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NEWS

The nanny who could face a murder charge

Blair hit by Old Labour junketing

Council auditor criticises drunken lunches, foreign trips and free-loading

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR
 Westminster Correspondent

A council run by a tightly-knit group of Labour politicians, two of whom are front runners to fight a parliamentary election, has been criticised by the District Auditor over junkets, expenses, and "inappropriate" gifts and hospitality.

The criticisms are an embarrassment to Tony Blair because they dent New Labour's image and resurrect the spectre of old-fashioned town hall politics which the Labour leader is desperate to shed.

Councillors on Doncaster council, where Labour has an overwhelming majority, went on trips around the world, including to Japan, Hong Kong, China, Sweden, Poland and the United States, without formal authority and no public records of the trips were kept by the council.

According to the District Auditor, the accounts, councillors on some trips flew club class - breaching council rules. They went on drunken binges running up staggering bills, with one meal for two costing £284 and "working" lunches at £50 per head where most of the bill was for alcohol.

At a meeting last month of leading officers and councillors, the District Auditor, Gordon Sutton, said: "The level of alcohol consumed at these lunches makes it unlikely that those attending them could do any work in the afternoon, let alone stand up."

Councillors and officials accepted "inappropriate" hospitality including raffle tickets where the prize was a trip for two to the Kentucky Derby.

The revelations will cause widespread alarm at Labour Party headquarters, which only last week published a document stressing the virtues of the party's local government stewardship. It is particularly embarrassing because the selection process for the vacant Don Valley seat, caused by the death of Martin Redmond, has just begun.

Two councillors and front-runners for the nomination - the council leader, Peter Welsh, and Labour group chairman, Tony Sellars, lead a small group of Labour councillors which acts as an inner caucus running the council.

Tory Central Office, which will do its utmost to exploit Labour's embarrassment, has known of events in Doncaster for some time but had hoped to keep a lid on them until the election campaign. The Tories will also find it harder to launch an attack on Labour's record on local government since the amounts of money involved in Doncaster pale into insignificance compared with the £20m surcharge imposed on councillors and officers in Tory-controlled Westminster.

Mr Welsh went to Japan in December, where he visited a racetrack. Mr Sellars, who on Sunday night won the nomination from the ward to select its candidate for Don Valley, went on four trips - to China, Poland, Sweden and Jersey. Mr Sellars accepted yesterday he had been on a twinning trip to the Chinese town of Dandong travelling business class, but could not recollect whether he had been on the other trips. He said: "I will have to look at my diary we have a system of authorisation by officers. Maybe we rely on officers too much."

The District Auditor told last month's meeting of senior officers and councillors that there was a "lack of control" over the foreign visits, that the rules were "ambiguous and open to interpretation", and there was "abuse of the system".

Although the chief executive, Doug Hale, had authority to sanction trips, sometimes this had not been sought, Mr Sutton said: "Foreign trips had taken place without authority from the chief executive or members."

Some council members had travelled club or business class, whereas council rules specified economy. Mr Sutton also questioned the payment of £30 per day subsistence allowances to councillors for "incidental" expenses when, in fact, council credit cards issued to them were already used to pay for mini-bars, telephone bills and videos. A source at the District Auditor's office said: "There is evidence that overclaiming has occurred."

A council policy and resources committee voted last week to withdraw all but six of the 27 council credit cards which had been issued to councillors and senior officers. It also voted to scrap foreign trips, saving an estimated £115,000 per year and the £12,000-a-year Jaguar, leased to council leaders, is to be returned.

Doncaster owns the local racecourse at which the free bar for members of the racecourse committee and a free drink for any other councillor also came under criticism from Mr Sutton.

The overall cost came out of a special budget which the council said amounted to less than £200,000. Last week, the council also discussed proposed cuts of £5m in its budget because of reductions in central government grant. A council spokesman said last night that the District Auditor's report was being acted on and new guidelines drawn up.

Further report, page 11

Tory threat: We will make the Scots pay

Anthony Bevins
 Political Editor

The Conservatives yesterday threatened to punish the Scottish people with an annual penalty of about £20m in cutbacks if they allow Labour to set up an Edinburgh parliament.

Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth warned that the differential between spending north and south of the border - amounting to more than £890 extra for every man, woman and child in Scotland - could be slashed from central Government spending.

But George Robertson, Labour's spokesman, told *The Independent*: "The Scottish people do not recognise that they are being subsidised, and see no signs of it about them."

In England, people think that if the Scots are being that lavishly subsidised, why did Mrs Thatcher do nothing about it?

After a day of disarray and confusion in Cabinet ranks, with Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell twice appearing to contradict the Government line on Labour's devolution plans, the Prime Minister's office said there was no disagreement between ministers.

Repudiating a suggestion that a future Conservative government would abolish the Scottish parliament - a threat reportedly made by Mr Dorrell in an interview with *The Scotsman* - Mr Forsyth said: "A Scottish parliament is not just for Christmas, it's for life."

He also contradicted Mr Dorrell's statement, in a BBC radio interview yesterday, that there would have to be changes to any Scottish parliament that was set up by Labour.

Mr Forsyth said a parliament would be irrevocable, adding: "Once Humphrey Dumpty falls off the wall, he will not be put back together again no matter how many of the king's horses and the king's men turn up."

"It would grow into a creature which might do enormous damage in Scotland, but we would have to live with the consequences of it."

However, Mr Forsyth said: "If people in Scotland vote for a tax-raising parliament, and that is established, then the consequences that follow from that, in terms of the rights of Scottish members of Parliament to vote at Westminster, the whole question of the funding of Scotland's parliament - at the moment, Scotland is about 30 per cent better funded per head than England - all of those issues will need to be resolved, and there will be very dramatic and adverse consequences for Scotland."

The Scottish Office last night provided figures showing that in the latest available year, identifiable spending by country was £3,614 for England and £4,505 in Scotland in 1994-95.

If the 24.6 per cent differential was cut from the identifiable £23,120m Scottish budget for 1994-95, it would have cost Scotland a penalty of about £5.7bn.

A senior Labour source said Mr Forsyth was maintaining his tactic of trying "to frighten the children", while Mr Dorrell was adopting the softer line that action could be taken to mitigate the impact of a new parliament.

In a letter to the Prime Minister last night, Mr Robertson said: "There is now a deep and disturbing division within your Cabinet on this aspect of your Government's policy on devolution, with the Scottish Secretary apparently isolated. Can you say which side you support?"

Jim Wallace, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, told BBC radio: "Stephen Dorrell has blundered out of his depth. He doesn't appreciate sensitivities in Scotland. If the objective of the Conservative and Unionist Party is to save the Union, I can't think of one act more calculated to break it up than to give people a Scottish parliament then try to take it away."

Donald Macintyre, page 19



BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY/PHOTOMONTAGE: JEROME CORNICK

The elderly inherit, not the meek, as thrift leads to record number of millionaires

Steve Boggan

The meek are out inheriting the earth - the elderly are. According to new research into the distribution of wealth in the United Kingdom, one in 550 adults is a millionaire, and the fastest-growing group are pensioners.

More than 81,000 people are now classed as millionaires, the most in history, and, for the first time, the number who have grown rich by graft and theft has overtaken those who have inherited wealth.

The research, by Datamonitor, a strategic management consultancy, shows that the number of millionaires - people with net, unencumbered assets over £1m and £50,000 in liquid assets - has more than doubled since 1991 when the figure stood at 31,100.

More than 19,000 of those are over 65, but only 17,000 out of the total of 81,000 inherited their money.

"This shows a major shift in wealth reflecting people's concerns about providing for themselves in their old age, rather than relying on state provision," said William Yoganandram, an analyst at Datamonitor.

"People are saving more and investing more, a trend which is resulting in the elderly having more spending power than before."

"People who inherit their money still form a large proportion of millionaires, but it is a shrinking proportion."

Datamonitor's figures, gleaned from public records at the Inland Revenue, the Central Statistical Office and the Office of National Statistics, show that in 1991, 8.2 per cent of millionaires were elderly - over 65 - compared with 9.5 per cent who were inheritors.

By 1995, the balance had shifted to 19.1 per cent elderly and 16.8 per cent inheritors.

Of all millionaires, 24 per cent are elderly, almost 21 per cent inherited their wealth and 12 per cent saved it from highly paid employment. Last year, of the 10,000 new millionaires, 2,000 were elderly, 1,200 were inheritors and 810 were workers.

There is also a small, but increasingly significant, group who have gained their wealth through the National Lottery. By the end of 1996, there were 288 lottery millionaires; the figure now is nearer 300.

The research does not, however, look at the strikingly obvious - the fact that more millionaires at the top must equate to more poor people at the bottom.

Datamonitor is preparing new research on what it calls the "middle bracket" of earners, those with £10,000 to £100,000. However, asked whether a third piece of research would be forthcoming on the poor, Datamonitor said no. "There's not much call for that," said Mr Yoganandram.

Just as well. The price for a copy of the latest report, *UK High Net Worth Individuals 1997*, is £1,495.



QUICKLY

Albanian city seized
 Anti-government demonstrators seized control of the southern Albanian port of Vlorë, stripping riot police of guns, gear, and even their clothes as they demanded the resignation of the government and return of money lost in failed pyramid schemes. Page 15

Ashworth suspension
 A consultant became the fourth member of staff at Ashworth Hospital to be suspended following claims that pornography and paedophilia were permitted in the hospital. Page 5

Violence hits Spain
 Separatist violence ripped through Spain from north to south when a car bomb killed a man and wounded eight people in Granada, a gunman shot dead a Supreme Court judge in the street in Madrid, and the leader of the Basque nationalist party linked to ETA separatists was found dead, possibly by his own hand, near Bilbao. Page 14

Segers denial
 The former Wimbledon goalkeeper Hans Segers, who is accused of taking part in a conspiracy to fix matches, told a jury he had never thrown a game in his life. Page 11

NHS retreat
 A retreat on the National Health Service Primary Care Bill is expected by the Secretary of State for Health, Stephen Dorrell, in order to avoid a row with family doctors, over the so-called "supermarket" surgeries, which the Conservatives believe could undermine their election campaign. Page 6

Governor's choice
 Elton John is to take part in the hand-over of Hong Kong to China in June, when thousands of tourists are expected to witness the British withdrawal from the colony, which officially takes place at midnight on 30 June. The superstar's presence for the ceremony is the choice of the Governor, Chris Patten, a long-standing fan. Page 2

Bank raises stakes
 The Bank of England is poised to raise the stakes in its clash with Kenneth Clarke with a renewed demand for interest rates to rise. But the Chancellor is widely expected to put politics first and avoid increasing borrowing and mortgage costs before the election. Page 20

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news

significant shorts

Blair attacks Chancellor over £14bn 'black hole'

Tony Blair yesterday called on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to clarify whether or not there was a "black hole" in the Government's finances.

The Labour leader was referring to a report in yesterday's *Independent* that the National Institute of Economic and Social Research has calculated there will need to be tax increases or public spending cuts of up to £14bn. "What this indicates yet again is a great big black hole in the public finances," Mr Blair said.

Speaking at a news conference on Labour's plans for small business, he added: "What I would like to know is what the Chancellor of the Exchequer says to this. Is this true or not? Does this deficit exist or not?"

The study by the National Institute, headed by Treasury adviser, Martin Weale, is due to be published next month.

Diane Coyle

Jury fails to reach verdict on killing

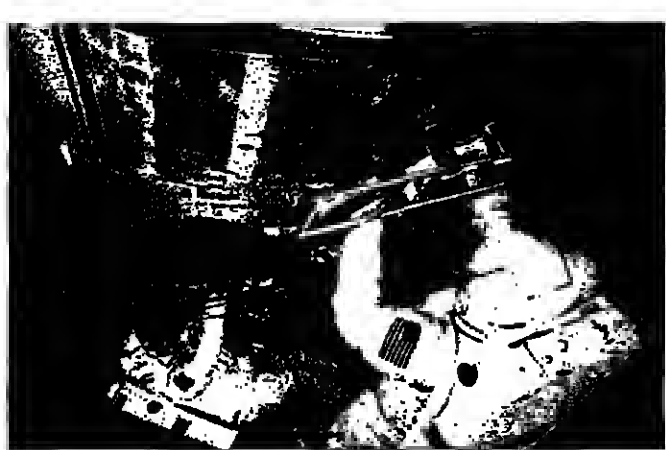
A jury in the trial of a father and two sons accused of murdering wife and mother Eve Howells were sent home overnight last night after failing to reach verdicts. The seven men and five women will resume deliberations tomorrow at Leeds Crown Court, where they spent six hours considering the case today.

David Howells, 48, and sons Glenn, 17, and John, 16, plead not guilty to murdering Mrs Howells, 48, at the family home in Dalton Green Lane, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, in August 1995. Glenn admits the manslaughter of his mother on the grounds of provocation. He claims he bludgeoned her to death in their living room after suffering years of mental and physical cruelty.

Missing teenager found safe

A missing anorexic teenager, Jackie Hooker, was found safe, police said yesterday. She was found in Brixton, south London, said Thames Valley Police. The news came after Colin and Lynne Hooker made an emotional appeal for the 16-year-old, who weighs just 4st 8lb, to make contact with them.

Mission to repair Hubble telescope



Astronauts are to make a series of space repairs to the Hubble Space Telescope (HST) over the next week, to enhance its stunning astronomical capabilities even further.

The Space Shuttle was due to take off yesterday on its way to the second repair mission for the HST, first launched in 1990. The astronauts on board will carry out at least four spacewalks in order to replace some of the older observation instruments and install state-of-the-art systems that will give even better views of the origins of the universe. They have been training for the mission for two years, carrying out the work on full-sized underwater mock-ups (above), to simulate the weightlessness of space. Charles Arthur

Pop singer Brian Connolly dead

Brian Connolly, the once-hard-living singer of 1970s glam rock band, The Sweet, died early today, aged 52, a friend disclosed.

Connolly, whose hits included *Blackbush*, *Ballroom Blitz* and *Wig Wam Bam*, died of renal failure in hospital in Slough with his friends and family around him.

The blond singer had a string of heart-attacks behind him, which started in 1981. He suffered the last in January this year, discharged himself from hospital after a week, but was re-admitted a week later for the last time. *Obituary, page 16*

Poor deal for low-income savers

Low-income savers get a poor deal from financial institutions they entrust with their money, according to a report published yesterday by the National Consumer Council. The NCC believes that the closure of bank and building society branches, plus local offices, all whittle away at effective consumer choice.

The report makes 20 suggestions to improve matters, including a call for banks to attract more young customers; for National Savings, the government agency, to provide cheap pensions; and for more education about financial matters. *Nic Cicutt*

people



Piano man: A personal favourite of Governor Chris Patten, Elton will be top of the bill in June

Elton to perform as the sun goes down on British rule

The magic combination of Elton John, Hong Kong's Urban Services Department and the fulfilment of the second Convention of Peking are coming together in June for celebrations to mark the handover of power in the colony. Elton is the first internationally famous star to have been firmly booked by the Urban Services Department for one of the concerts which will celebrate the transfer of power.

Practically every other famous name in the music world has been mentioned as a potential performer for a handover concert. However, those organising these events have been curiously slow off the mark and are having difficulties booking real superstars at relatively short notice.

But Elton has confirmed. "He is coming to Hong Kong on the last weekend of the handover," Peter

Randall, head of public relations at the Hong Kong Tourist Association, said yesterday.

Organisers said they hoped 40,000 people would pack Hong Kong stadium for each of the shows on 28 and 29 June. Thousands of tourists are expected, and - with many hotel rooms already taken by journalists, officials and diplomats, it is likely to be one of the biggest parties in the world this year.

The explanation for Elton John's presence seems to lie in the personal preferences of Hong Kong's Governor, Chris Patten, an avid music lover, is said to be a big fan. He invited Elton to lunch at Government House in 1993.

Elton's songs are extremely popular in China, though he has had less luck with plans to perform on the other side of the border. Authorities in Peking are said to have

objected several years ago when the idea was mooted of an Elton John concert within the walls of the Imperial Forbidden City in Peking. Hong Kong plans to spend HK\$233 million (£18m) on glitzy ceremonies to mark the handover. The Black Watch will be in attendance, to lend the appropriate note of post-imperial grandeur.

The Union Flag will be lowered for the last time in Hong Kong at midnight on 30 June, marking the end of more than a century and a half of colonial rule. China's red flag will then be hoisted.

Perhaps the most apt number for Elton to perform, given the nervousness amongst the HK population, would be an old concert favourite - "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me".

Stephen Vines
Leader, page 15

West End actors banned by US Equity

Janet McTeer's acclaimed West End portrayal of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* may now not be seen in New York after a fierce row broke out between the play's British producers and American Equity.

The US actors' union has banned three of Miss McTeer's co-stars, Owen Teale, John Gower and Peter Gower, saying the parts could be played by American actors. Miss McTeer (right) has been granted permission to act on Broadway. Both Miss McTeer and Owen Teale have been nominated for Olivier Awards for their performances.

The show's producer, Thelma Holt, said there was no way she could let the production transfer without the three performers in question.

She added: "One of the reasons we have been given is that it's not an English play so you don't need English actors. How ridiculous." Fellow West End producer Bill Kenwright, who was set to spend \$1m taking the production to New York, said: "It's a mind-blowing decision. I thought they would welcome us with open arms."

Mr Kenwright will be appealing to American Equity. He had already made an application for an exchange procedure, by which he would bring three American actors into a London production. *David Lister*

Liam and Patsy call off their big day

Liam Gallagher and Patsy Kensit (right) yesterday failed to tie the knot, despite having more than 100 guests, albeit unwitting ones, in attendance at three different London venues and their St John's Wood home.

The Oasis singer and his girlfriend, who had obtained special licences for six separate locations, instead issued a statement saying that "obsessive and intrusive media attention had removed any dignity from what was to be a private and special occasion".

Not since Miss Kensit last got married has so much press attention been generated by so little. Reporters and cameramen were deployed across the capital in the hope that they would hit on the correct venue.

Press attention was particularly intense at 30 Pavilion Road, an exclusive Knightsbridge restaurant and odds-on favourite for a combined ceremony and reception. The unwitting passed the day leaning on redundant police barriers, while photographers with long lenses cat-called at each other from the roofs of nearby office blocks.

While fans were disappointed, one freelance photographer went home happy. He was being paid £100 per day by eight newspapers to be on standby, and had made £800 by doing nothing. "I hope they do it again tomorrow," he said. *Jojo Moyes*

briefing

TRANSPORT

New traffic laws for Britain in EU drive to cut deaths

Britain will have to bring in new road safety measures if the target of halving car deaths in Europe by the year 2010 is confirmed, according to an EU report. Member states need to standardise speed limits, reduce legally acceptable levels of alcohol for drivers, increase seat-belt use and modify car design, said the European Transport Safety Council.

In an influential proposal to the EU, the ETSC called for the introduction of a strategic road safety plan to cut fatalities. Many of the measures are likely to be brought in by the Dutch presidency, which is putting forward a package of road safety policies before the summer. The plan could mean new laws for Britain, despite its position as top of Europe's road safety league.

The ETSC report called for the EU to aim for 95 per cent of drivers to use seat belts, saving 7,000 lives a year, and for road standards to be harmonised across Europe. Motorists driving on the Trans-European Road Network - the motorway which links Europe - would have to travel at under 75mph.

SOCIETY

Accent on Scotland

A Scottish accent is the nation's favourite, according to a poll conducted by Cellnet, the mobile telephone network. Eighteen per cent of people found a Scots accent the most appealing. But when asked whose telephone voice was the most trustworthy, nearly half voted for the traditional English counties accent.

The poll, carried out among 993 adults, also showed that the actor Sean Connery was the people's choice for the perfect voice. Joanna Lumley and Anthea Turner tied in second place. David Garfinkel



ECONOMICS

Clarke's pay crusade fails

Kenneth Clarke has failed in his 10-year mission to revolutionise the way Britons reward themselves for work, according to a study published today. In a speech on 11 February 1987, Mr Clarke, then Secretary of State for Employment, called for the elimination of five deadly sins: the annual pay round, the going rate, "comparability", job evaluation and - perhaps worst of all - national pay bargaining.

A decade later, all five still have a major role to play in wage determination, research group Incomes Data Services observes. National bargaining has been retained in a number of industries. National pay rates still exist at the banks, the big supermarket chains and companies such as Ford, Vauxhall and McDonald's.

So far as "comparability" is concerned, the vast majority of people still get an annual pay rise reflecting what is happening elsewhere - whether through inflation or what is being paid by competitors. *Barrie Clement*

HEALTH

Hip replacements a waste of cash

Unreliable hip replacements are not lasting long enough, causing pain and wasting money, according to the Consumers Association. Only the newest and cheapest models - a handful of the 60 models on the market - last for a worthwhile length of time, about 11 per cent of all hip replacements in Britain, and some experts predict this figure could soon rise to 25 per cent. These "revision" operations are more complicated, more expensive and have a poorer success rate than the initial replacements, the *Health* Which? research found.

More than half the models on the market had been introduced since 1990, but only the newest and cheapest implants had enough long-term evidence to support their use, it argued. However *Health* Which? claims the latest models waste more money for manufacturers who were keen on them being used by as many surgeons as possible. *Glenda Cooper*

WHITEHALL

Top civil service posts vacant

Six high-ranking civil service posts were left vacant last year because departments were unable to find suitable candidates to fill them. An annex to last week's review body report on "senior salaries" says that, following open competition for 67 senior Whitehall vacancies in the year to June 1996, no appointment was made in six cases "either because there was no appropriate candidate or because suitable candidates had declined offers".

The Civil Service Commissioners told the review body that increased pay flexibility had helped recruitment generally, but "it was still difficult to attract top quality candidates... in particular from the private sector". In the most senior ranks, women still found it difficult to break through Whitehall's glass ceiling. For vacancies in the top three grades: "women represented 13 per cent of applicants, 6 per cent of those short-listed for interview, and 10 per cent of those successful."

Nineteenth Report on Senior Salaries. Review Body on Senior Salaries. Volume 1 Cm3540. HMSO, £7.20. *Anthony Bovens*

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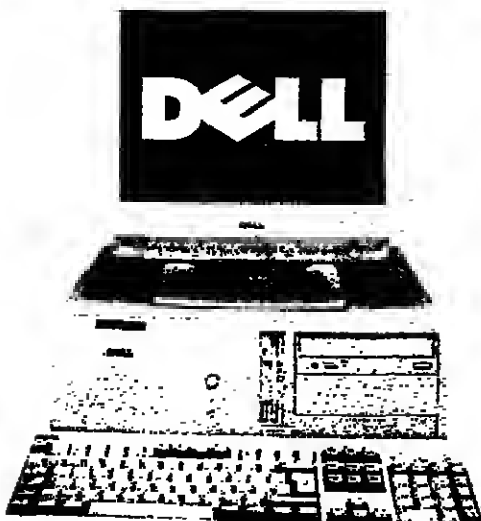
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صلى الله عليه وسلم

The nanny facing a murder charge

Baby of nine months dies after shaking

David Usborne
New York

Prosecutors in Massachusetts were expected last night to bring murder charges against the 18-year-old British nanny Louise Woodward, following the death from "shaken-baby syndrome" of a nine-month-old infant who had been in her care.

A spokeswoman for the Children's Hospital in Boston confirmed that the child, Matthew Eatten, died shortly after 11 pm on Sunday evening from injuries to the brain. The official cause of death was cited as "intracranial haemorrhage" or bleeding in the brain.

Ms Woodward, who enrolled with a nanny agency in the Boston area last June, had been working

to Boston but has not been able to raise the bail money. The bail, however, is likely to be set higher, if murder charges are pressed.

In announcing the initial charges, prosecutors made it clear that they would be replaced by murder charges if the boy was to die. After a court hearing in Boston on Friday, Assistant District Attorney Lynn Roney told reporters: "If the baby should not survive, the Commonwealth [of Massachusetts] will seek a murder indictment".

The parents of Matthew are both doctors in Boston. Sunil Eatten, 30, is an anaesthesiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital. His wife, Deborah, 31, is an ophthalmologist. They also have an older son, Brendan, who was also in Ms Woodward's care.

In a brief statement issued on their behalf by the hospital, the couple said: "Matthew was a tremendous gift and joy to us, and he will forever be part of our lives".

In England, meanwhile, the mother of Louise, Sue Woodward, has been speaking out about her own distress over the child's death. "Yesterday all the news had been positive because we hadn't heard anything about Matthew's condition", she told the Press Association yesterday.

"That is all we were praying for," Mrs Woodward added. "I can't imagine how his parents must feel. I have already lost my daughter - but I have at least got the hope of getting her back".

Ms Woodward would normally face a trial in Massachusetts and could be imprisoned for life if found guilty. Her own life is not in peril, however, because the state, unlike a majority in the US, does not practise capital punishment.

The teenager was referred to the Eattens by a nanny agency based in Cambridge, just outside Boston, called EF Au Pair. Until November she had been working in the home of Hattie Komishane in another Massachusetts town, Manchester-by-the-Sea. She left the first family after arguments about when she should be expected to come home in the evenings.

Mr Komishane stressed, however, that he never had any concerns about his family's welfare in Ms Woodward's hands. "There was nothing that would give us any idea that she would do anything to harm the baby or anyone else's child," he said.

Sue Woodward similarly expressed bafflement over what could have triggered such an assault against Matthew by her daughter. "Louise isn't the sort of person in the papers," she insisted. "She loved life and she loved people. Out of all of us she had the nicest nature. If there was someone that irritated her and wasn't very nice she would be kind to them and try to find out why people didn't like them."



Louise Woodward (right) talks with her attorney Maria Galvagno in court in Boston last Thursday during her arraignment for assault on a child who has since died

The common sense that parents must rely on

Paul Valley

The parents of Matthew Eatten made an assumption which so many parents routinely make: that an 18-year-old young woman would naturally possess the skills to cope with looking after their nine-month-old baby.

Had the au pair from England been male they might have asked more questions. But political correctness has not yet seriously affected the messages Western culture predisposes parents to give to their daughters to prepare them for a role as carers. So the supposition goes unchallenged that a young woman of child-bearing age is unquestionably a fit person.

Perhaps Louise Woodward is. Only a court can now decide on that. But the supposition made by Mr and Mrs Eatten is worth examining.

When it comes to a nanny it is possible to ask for professional qualifications. With an after-school childminder the law sets rigorous standards. But for the au pair or the babysitter only the common sense of

the parents stands between them and disaster.

Once that seemed enough. When a typical family contained three or four children its members picked up much about childcare by osmosis. Today, the family has downsized - 1.8 children is now the average. The days when elder daughters looked after their younger siblings have largely gone. So have the support systems provided by extended families. Today there is far more available in the way of expert advice - in handbooks and magazines - but it is a poor substitute close-up examples of parenting.

The state has made some attempt to compensate. Parenting skills are today part of the "personal, social and health education" component of the national curriculum. But most educational and child psychologists think the attention given to them is perfunctory.

The case against unnecessary intervention and regulation by the state no longer needs to be made. But the changing nature of the modern family suggests

that concern by the state is not unnecessary.

Much research shows that, contrary to the prejudices of many adults, today's adolescents are more rather than less responsible than were previous generations. But it also shows that they feel they need more assistance at school on relationships and parenting, ethics and morals, health and drug risks. It has always seemed ironic that the rigorous process of scrutiny applied to couples wanting to adopt a child has no natural correlative. Being a parent is perhaps the most profound activity which most school-leavers will ever undertake. It is also the one for which school leaves them least prepared.

Were that not so, young women like Louise Woodward would know that psychologists say most parents feel, if not murderous intent, at least powerfully negative feelings towards a ceaselessly screaming infant. They would also have learned something of the strategies and support systems to help them cope with it.



As they were: Unemployed nannies meet with their charges on the morning walk in Kensington Gardens, central London, 1933

Photograph: Hulton Getty

What to check when hiring a nanny

- Five tips from Dr Charlie Lewis, an expert in parenting, at Lancaster University's Psychology Department
- Get as many character references as you can.
 - Get the candidates to play with the child and watch the interaction. Do they really like children?
 - Find out what they want from the job. Is it incompatible with your needs?
 - Insist on a trial period.
 - Don't expect that you sign off when you are not present. Discuss support systems they have in your absence.

There was nothing that would give us any idea that she would harm the baby or anyone else's child

for the Eatten family since November. She arrived in the United States from her family home in Chester.

The drama will rekindle debate in the US about the wisdom of leaving children in the care of strangers as dramatised in the chilling hit film *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*.

This real-life tragedy began last Tuesday when Ms Woodward telephoned the emergency services from the Eatten home asking for help and saying that Matthew was injured and had stopped breathing.

Suspicion that the child's condition had been induced by shaking was aroused on his admission to the hospital. Doctors found that his eyes were bulging, a common symptom of shaken-baby syndrome. They confirmed that the brain had been traumatised by repeated smashing against the side of the skull.

Police later said that the teenager told them that she had treated Matthew roughly in the family bathroom and had shaken him later because he had become fussy and she had become frustrated and lost her patience.

Matthew was kept alive on life support from the moment of his admission last Tuesday until his death on Sunday.

Ms Woodward was jailed last week on initial charges of assault and battery. Bail was set at \$100,000. Her father, Gary Woodward, a Chester builder, has flown

Calls grow for drug-test law

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

Another leading doctor has spoken out against random compulsory drug-testing for workers, saying that it is "often unhelpful" and does not protect the employee's rights, while presenting ethical problems for health-care staff.

It also emerged that the UK lacks national guidelines for drug-testing because the organisations which might have created them have been privatised, meaning that their views do not carry any official weight with private companies. Instead, standards set by the US government are used, in a haphazard fashion.

Dr Alexander Forrest, of the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield, said that the lack of clear legislation in the UK could lead to abuse by employers during random testing of employees or job applicants for use of drugs such as heroin, cannabis, cocaine and alcohol.

"If workplace drug-screening is regarded by the employer as a non-medical issue, then the employee should have the same protection as ... in a criminal investigation," writes Dr Forrest in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, published today. "Such protection may require new legislation."

His comments echo those of Dr John Honour, who in yesterday's *Independent* said:

"There aren't any standards for positive tests or for how the tests should be done ... If you failed a pre-employment test you might not even hear - you'd just not get offered the job."

Dr Honour's knowledge of urine-testing and pharmacology helped clear the name of Diane Modahl, the athlete wrongly suspended in 1994 for taking drugs. But he is concerned that although drug-testing is growing rapidly, there are no national standards.

A major testing laboratory yesterday told *The Independent* that the only standards currently used by drug-testing laboratories are those set by the US National Institutes for Drug Abuse (NIDA).

The UK does not have any of its own because the only government organisations which might have set them - the National Physical Laboratory and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC) - have been privatised.

Most companies use some form of the NIDA standards. But those are far from perfect. "Basically, when these were introduced in the 1980s in the US, they set them as low as their testing equipment could manage," said Mr Walker.

However, that is sometimes too sensitive. Laboratories are aware that their tests can give a positive result for opiates if someone eats a bagel covered with poppy seeds.

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COMPAQ

politics

Dorrell set for a climbdown over NHS Bill

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A retreat on the NHS Primary Care Bill is expected to be signalled today by Stephen Dorrell, the Secretary of State for Health, to avoid a row with family doctors over "supermarket surgeries" spoiling the Tories' general election campaign.

Mr Dorrell privately has assured the doctors' leaders that an amendment will be made to the Bill during the committee stage to make it clear that supermarket chains will not be able to hire GPs, although pilots may be allowed for supermarkets to open surgeries with GPs as their tenants.

Labour will reinforce its opposition to the "supermarket clause" by forcing a vote tonight against the second reading of the Bill. The Labour motion says the proposal to allow private companies to hire GPs would undermine the doctor-patient relationship and "pave the way for privatisation of the NHS".

Mr Dorrell agreed to revise the clause after the British Medical Association warned that it would ask GPs to make the proposal for "supermarket surgeries" an election issue. Among stores which have expressed an interest are Asda, and Unilever, the chemist chain.

The move by Mr Dorrell to silence the criticism comes as the Government is gearing up

for the election with a series of economic statistics - including the labour market figures tomorrow and the retail price index on Thursday - which are expected to show continued economic recovery.

Downing Street said a "belting set of industry pricing figures" showed record lows demonstrated the "very low inflation pressures in the economy", a clear sign that John Major is supporting the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, in resisting the pressure by Eddie George.



Eddie George: Pressure for an increase in interest rates

the Governor of the Bank of England, for an increase in interest rates.

Mr Clarke caused a renewed flurry of speculation about the election date when he told a conference of newspaper editors in London: "We're bound to get one called in the next few weeks."

The Prime Minister must call an election by 22 May and although he is known to favour hanging on until 1 May - the date of the local elections - there was speculation that next week, he might cancel the Wirral South by-election on 27 February to hold an election on 20 March or 10 April.

Defending Britain's rejection of the European social chapter, William Waldegrave, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said an extra 33 million Europeans could be in work if the Continent matched the job-creating record of the United States.

In a keynote speech to the Social Market Foundation in London, Mr Waldegrave urged Europe to adopt an American-style flexible labour market.

He rounded on Britain's European Union partners for creating the European social chapter on workers' rights, and for burdening employers with high levels of protection for staff.

Mr Major is expected to give a boost to the Tories' election campaign on education at a press conference in London today. Government sources said the Prime Minister would be highlighting nursery education - one of the key battlegrounds for the election.

The Government is to expand nationally from 1 April the offer of £1,100 voucher for every four-year-old to pay for nursery care in the public, private or voluntary sector.



Meeting of continents: John Major extolling the merits of Britain as the best place to do business at the Latin America trade conference in London yesterday, which was attended by the presidents of Peru, Brazil and Panama. Photograph: Russell Boyce/Reuters

Role-play to give women that vital push for Parliament

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

Aspiring Labour MPs could find themselves role-playing advice surgeries or showing their talent "on the stump" under plans aimed at putting more women into Parliament.

Plans to introduce a variety of new tests for selection ap-

plicants are being considered by a committee set up to find a replacement for all-women shortlists, which were declared illegal last year.

The group, which is expected to report to the party next month, may also suggest replacing the controversial all-women lists with a quota system under which shortlists would

have to be at least 50 per cent female. A third reform under consideration is a central "approved" list of candidates like the one already run by the Conservatives.

The idea of role-play is designed to make selection procedures more women-friendly.

Party sources say that many women fail to push themselves

forward under the existing selection procedures, in which candidates are questioned in crowded meeting rooms. They add that some candidates who impress members with their platform skills turn out to be hopeless on the doorstep or when dealing with constituents. "You could select someone who has made a brilliant speech

and then when you get them out on the campaign trail they are no good at all," one MP said.

All-women shortlists were outlawed last January by an industrial tribunal in Leeds after two male members complained that they were being discriminated against. Since then the proportion of women selected for winnable seats has plummeted. Labour's overseas-aid spokeswoman, Clare Short, pointed out recently that she was one of only 157 women MPs ever elected to Parliament.

The policy had already had some effect, and is likely to boost the number of women MPs to around 90 out of 660. However, this will still be very low in comparison to other

countries such as Germany, where around a quarter of MPs are women. There, the Social Democrats operate a quota system.

Mary-Anne Stephenson, campaigns officer for the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for more women in Parliament and public life, welcomed the proposals.

"This could make a difference. Widening the selection procedure so that it is not just about being able to make one big barn-storming speech at one meeting is quite important," she said.

She added that extra training for potential candidates could also help them to put their best feet forward.

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CHG3

Harman plans one-stop shops for unemployed

Colin Brown

Some social security offices will be sold off in a merger with High Street JobCentres, saving the taxpayer up to £100m, under plans by Harriet Harman, Labour's social security spokeswoman, to introduce "one-stop shops" for the unemployed.

The plans fit in with the "simpler and smarter" government promised yesterday by Tony Blair, the Labour leader, and Ms Harman claims they could transform help for the unemployed to get back into work with a saving for the taxpayer.

Ms Harman, who has yet to announce the details, estimates that there could be a saving of £50m a year on administration costs, with a one-off saving of £50m on the sale of unwanted social security offices or JobCentres. "It's not just about saving money. It's about improving the service to the customer."

Under the changes, which have the backing of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, which deal with the problems, claimants would be able to obtain help with their job search at the same time as they applied for their

weekly benefits. The one-stop shops, using computer technology, could also advise on the availability of childcare facilities to enable mothers to seek work, and it could be used for the payment of housing benefit which is currently handled by local authorities. A tougher complaints procedure for customers would be introduced to reinforce the improvements.

"The starting point has to be refocused so that for people of working age, the emphasis will be on getting them off benefit and into work. You have to focus the service to getting smaller, but smarter, government," said Ms Harman.

It would end the duplication of queues, which Ms Harman found in Derby, where claimants have to queue for their benefit in one office, before going into the JobCentre next door to queue again for vacancies. That waste of time and resources, she believes, is repeated across Britain, and is hindering claimants from finding work. Streamlining the delivery of help for claimants and those seeking work could also help to cut fraud.

Blair at work on small businesses

Tony Blair is to make a concerted effort to portray Labour as the party of small business to the run-up to a general election with a series of initiatives aimed at highlighting the Tories' failings, writes Fran Abrams.

At the launch of Labour's latest campaign yesterday, the party's small-business spokeswoman said the present government had created more regulations than it had abolished, tying up companies in swathes of red tape.

Labour has promised to double the loans made to small technology firms under a government guarantee scheme in association with the banks and to have an annual parliamentary

debate on small business. It also says it will give small firms a stronger voice on the Deregulation Taskforce and provide an internet site which can be used for training.

Next month the party will hold a forum with small-business men and women in London to discuss projects which might help to cut red tape.

In the next few months the shadow chancellor Gordon Brown, shadow president of the board of trade Margaret Beckett and small-business spokeswoman Barbara Roche will take part in meetings and discussions throughout the country to highlight the campaign.

DAVID Aaronovitch

Long quest for the simple answer

"Questions" in the House of Commons are not the same as questions elsewhere. Outside (doubtless a consequence of our education system), the word suggests something to which an "answer" might be forthcoming. This convention stops at St Stephen's entrance; after nearly two decades in power this lot of ministers have perfected all the other, less revealing, ways of dealing with the imperfections of implied criticism. For the first 10 years, of course, it was "when the honourable gentleman's party was in government, the country was five minutes away from insurrection and the blood of white Englishwomen ran red in the streets".

Today, some ministers do not trouble even to refer to the fact that a question has been asked, simply slugging off current Labour policy (or lack of it) by way of response.

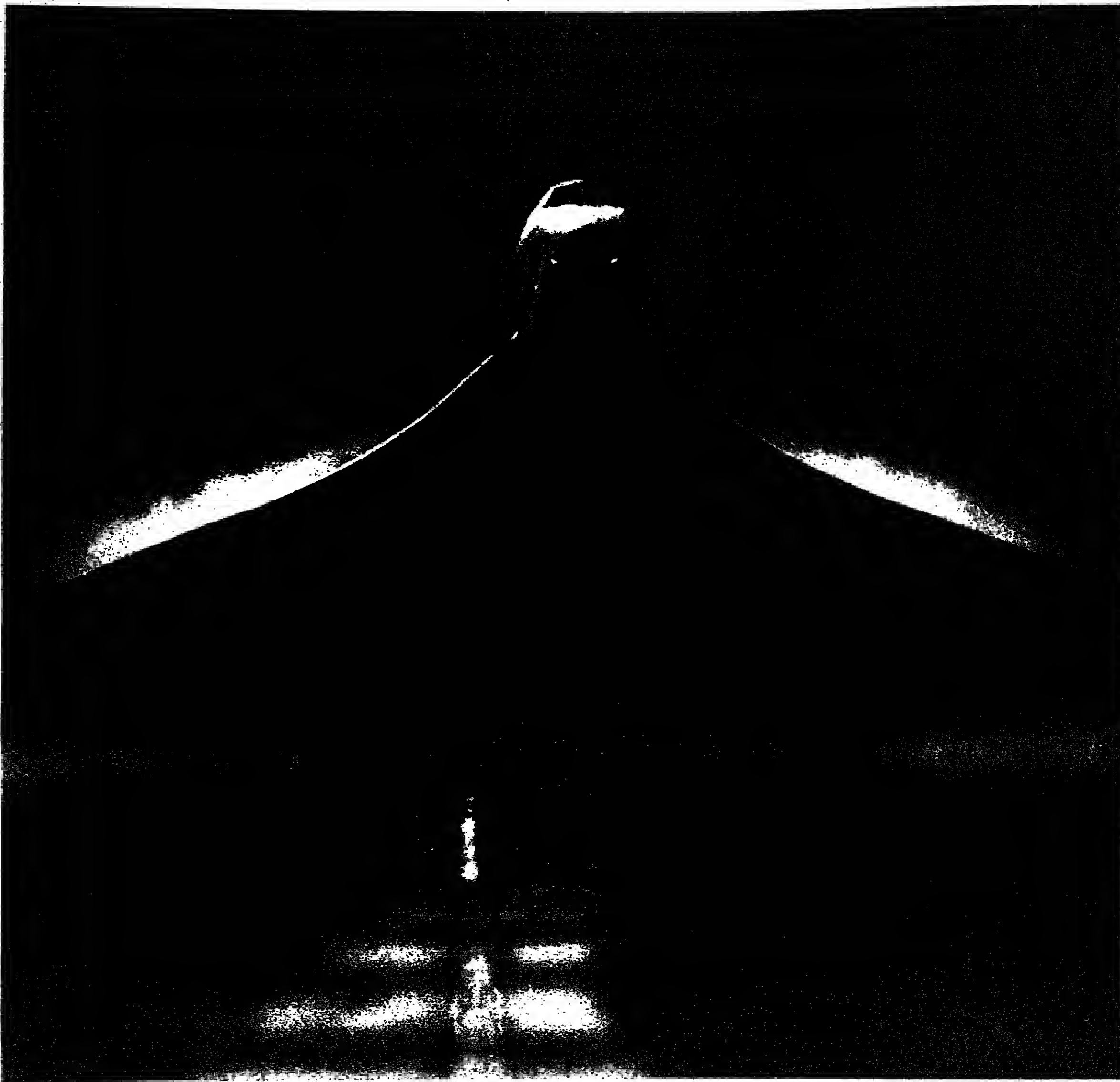
One oasis in this desert, however, is transport questions. Here, as yesterday, the chosen technique is not abuse or evasion but extreme long-windedness. True, the replies invariably begin with an expression of astonishment and hurt that the hon. gent or lady opposite should be so ignorant of the facts, or unappreciative of heroic government efforts, as to ask such a hostile question. But then they set to and answer. And answer. And answer. Take junior minister John Watts, who is capable of immense expatiation on the subject of planting trees next to motorways, and will always sacrifice an unnecessary joke in favour of a lengthy invitation for members to join him in a visit to said trees.

His colleague, John Bowis, is equally unfrivolous. He it was who fielded an enquiry from Michael Brown (Con, Brigg and Cleethorpes) concerning drivers falling asleep on the M180/A180. A study from Loughborough University had suggested that there was "clear evidence that if one travels in an easterly direction towards Grimsby, the road has certain conditions that cause drivers to go to sleep".

Mr Bowis leaned his substantial stomach against the dispatch box, and settled in for a long reply. In general, he told the House, accidents on that stretch of road were low (I half expected to discover that on the German A180 they were much higher, due to the Social Chapter), but there were indeed many incidents of driver fatigue. How could he explain this? Mr Bowis thoughtfully and seriously and slowly outlined all the conceivable options: lengthy journeys might account for it, he deemed, as might road conditions, or - possibly - "drivers not observing the Highway Code". In other words, every factor that might explain any accident anywhere at any time. Personally, I am attracted to the idea that this stretch of road is (for some reason) frequented by acquaintances of Mr Bowis, who - recalling evenings spent with the great man - drift off into fatal reverie.

But hold on a second, you may say. How can you simultaneously complain about dismissive answers from the dispatch box, and over-long ones? And how would you respond to questions from the likes of the sententious Dr Robert Spink, drink-banning half-member from Castle Point? Dr Spink, resplendent in a double-breasted suit (though he barely musters a single breast himself), was asking Tony Newton (Leader of the House) about drugs policy. Would he not commend the efforts of SNAF, "which stands" (said Spink, proudly) "for Say No and Phone". I would have paid a year's salary had Newton suggested that Spink might usefully FOAD. "Which stands for ..."

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news

The justice system is racist, says mother

The mother of the murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence broke down in court yesterday as she attacked a "racist" judicial system which had allowed her son's killers to cheat justice.

Speaking at the re-opened inquest into his death, at Southwark Coroner's Court in south-east London, Doreen Lawrence described the promising 18-year-old A-level student as "very friendly", "a quiet person" who was "loved by everyone".

But Mrs Lawrence, who saw three white men formally acquitted of her son's street stabbing murder after a private prosecution she brought folded last year, grew more angry as she added: "My son was murdered nearly four years ago. His killers are still walking the street."

She told the coroner, Sir Montague Levine: "When my son was murdered, the police saw my son as a criminal belonging to a gang. My son was stereotyped by the police. He was black, then he must be a criminal and they set about to investigate him and us."

Their investigation lasted two weeks, that allowed vital evidence to be lost. My son's



Seeking justice: Stephen Lawrence, who was killed in a racist attack nearly four years ago, and his mother Doreen

crime was that he was walking down the road looking out for a bus that would take him home. Our crime was living in a country where the justice system supports racist murders against innocent people. The value that this white racist country puts on black lives is evident to see since the killing of my son.

"In my opinion what happened in the crown court was staged, meaning it was decided long before we entered the courtroom what would happen, that the judge would not

allow the evidence to be presented to the jury."

Mrs Lawrence's son was stabbed as he waited for a bus in Eltham, south-east London, in April 1993. The family's private prosecution - only the fourth to be brought in 150 years - came after the Crown Prosecution Service abandoned the case against two young men in July, 1993, because it believed there was insufficient evidence to secure a conviction.

Mrs Lawrence told the court she and her husband, Neville,

searched for their son after a neighbour told them he had seen the attack. After failing to find him, the couple drove to the local hospital where staff refused to let them see him.

He died at 11.37pm - some 40 minutes after their arrival - of a haemorrhage due to stab wounds to the chest and arm.

Mrs Lawrence claimed police officers at the hospital failed to talk to the couple until the next morning. "No one told us anything at that stage," she said and accused officers of being "very patronising" towards her and dismissive of her information.

She said that when she visited the police station, she tried to present an officer with a list of names of possible people involved. "He folded the paper and rolled it into a ball in his hand. I asked him if he was going to put it in a bin. At the time they were not taking my son's death as seriously as they should have done."

The coroner told the jury that the teenager had left a 150-yard trail of blood before collapsing unconscious and lost "an awful lot of blood" as he tried to flee. The hearing continues.

Loophole in seat-belt law

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

Children's lives could be put at risk by cash-strapped local authorities and irresponsible coach companies exploiting loopholes in new legislation designed to make journeys to school safer, safety campaigners claimed yesterday.

The laws enforcing fitting of seat-belts in minibuses and coaches carrying three or more children came into force yesterday. The Government was forced to act after a series of accidents which included the No-

vember 1993 M40 minibus crash in which 12 children and their teacher were killed.

However, both safety campaigners and industry lobby groups said they were "concerned" about the new legislation. "There are certainly loopholes in the law for older coaches. We expect responsible operators to work within the spirit of the law," said Simon Posner, a spokesman for the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which lobbies for the coach industry.

Under the laws there is no requirement that seat-belts added

to older vehicles have to be checked by experts. Last year, inspectors for Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (Rospa), found one company had used exhaust brackets to fit seat belts.

Experts also point out that although coaches have to fit seat-belts, no operator has to check children are wearing them. Rospa and the bus industry wants the Government to pay for "escorts" to ensure children are strapped in. The Department of Transport later said it would shortly produce proposals for inspecting the belts.

Another flaw in the laws means companies could avoid fitting belts by limiting the top speed of their vehicles and having them reclassified as buses.

Last week, *The Really Useful Show*, a BBC consumer programme, obtained a letter from a Welsh council advising bus operators about another loophole in the seat-belt rules. Denbighshire county council's head of highways and transportation told companies that "you can of course fit speed limits to existing vehicles, which will remove the requirement to fit seat-belts."



Tuned in: Some of the 5,000 primary-school children from all over London who yesterday swarmed into the Royal Festival Hall for the Lollipop Proms, to play music from the whole sonic spectrum Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

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Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

Britain's jails will begin overflowing next month, causing the Prison Service to resort to costly police cells unless controversial plans for a floating jail get the go-ahead, Richard Tilt, the director-general, warned yesterday.

Speaking at the service's annual conference in Manchester, Mr Tilt said the population of the 135 establishments in England and Wales was likely to reach about 60,000 by next month, exceeding their total capacity. But Weymouth and Portland borough councils voted last week to oppose plans to moor the prison ship *Resolution* in Portland Harbour, Dorset. Without the ship, Mr Tilt warned: "We will probably go into police cells around the middle of March."

Police cells cost up to £300 a night, six or seven times the cost of keeping a prisoner in a jail. Mr Tilt warned a meeting of prison governors earlier that the

prison population would hit 62,000 later this year. If the current rate of increase was maintained it would reach at least 66,000 by 2000.

Lancaster City Council yesterday deferred discussions of plans to use a former Pontin's holiday camp at Heysham, near Morecambe. The site is close to two nuclear power plants, Heysham 1 and 2, and the Prison Service must draw up plans to safely and speedily evacuate the site in the event of an accident.

However, the councillors decided to defer the matter until the service had concluded discussions with HM Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Prison officials had intended to ship over their newly acquired jail from its current home on the Hudson River in New York and berth it in Portland Harbour next month until the local councils refused to give it planning permission. It was estimated that the floating prison will cost more than £40m of taxpayers' money.

New scare fuels baby milk fears

Glenda Cooper
Consumer Affairs Correspondent

A second brand of baby milk has been withdrawn following cases of salmonella poisoning among French babies. Two batches of the product Lemiel 2, made by Milupa, on sale in France only, have been taken off the market after two cases of salmonella anatum were confirmed.

The milk is made in the same factory as Milumil, the formula brand withdrawn from sale in the UK and Ireland after 10 babies in Britain suffered the same infection.

A spokeswoman for Milupa, now owned by the Dutch company Nutricia, said yesterday that no link had been confirmed between the Milumil case and Lemiel 2 but the batches were being withdrawn as a precautionary measure. "It was thought the wisest thing to do while the Milumil investigation was going on."

An inspection of the Colmar factory in France where both brands are made had been undertaken by the French authorities. UK experts from the Department of Health, and Milupa's technical-quality team, which had yet to find traces of salmonella. Some results of laboratory tests were still awaited. "No other product is suspected or linked. We do not know of any other cases," added the spokeswoman.

Fatti Rundall, international co-ordinator for Baby Milk Action, called for the Government and the European Commission to instigate tests at the Colmar and all other baby-food factories and for all breastmilk substitutes to carry warnings. "Nutricia and Milupa have spent millions of pounds on promotion which has minimised the risks of artificial feeding..." she said.

"Since all dairy herds have salmonella and other contaminations intermittently and it takes only a very few organisms to infect a formula-fed infant, parents should be aware of the risks they when buy these products."

In the red soil of Angola, twenty million land mines.

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For his mother, Molly, the start of a journey that will change her life for ever.

Who killed James Jordan?

Where does the blame really lie?



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Scientists of the rockpool help tiniest starfish to twinkle amid the pollution



Rare sight: A pair of the tiny brooding cushion stars sharing a rock pool at West Angle Bay with their larger cousin, the cushion star. Photograph: Rob Stratton

Nerys Lloyd-Pierce

A rare species of tiny starfish virtually wiped out when the *Sea Empress* tanker shed more than 70,000 tonnes of crude oil on the

Pembrokeshire coast 12 months ago may be getting a helping hand to regenerate its numbers thanks to a sophisticated process of DNA match-making. The brooding cushion star—

so named because it incubates its eggs—was flourishing in rock pools at West Angle Bay until heavy pollution from the tanker reduced numbers from an estimated 150 to approximately 12.

More seriously still, the remaining Pembrokeshire population failed to breed last year and the end of its three- to four-year life cycle is now approaching. According to experts

from King's College, London, and the Field Studies Council who have been monitoring it, the Welsh cushion star is considered to be functionally extinct without man's intervention.

"The hermaphrodite brooding cushion star needs to aggregate in order to breed," Dr Roland Emsen, senior lecturer in biology at King's College, explained. "Even if they are only

separated by a few metres within a rock pool they cannot locate each other in order for this to happen. Surveys carried out four months and eight months after the spill indicate that the

remaining population is too widely scattered for reproduction to take place."

The only hope of regenerating the colony in West Angle Bay—where it was first identified as a separate species in the mid-Seventies—is by extracting DNA from its tube feet and from those of specimens inhabiting similar terrain in south Devon and creating a genetic picture to see if the two are sufficiently compatible to breed.

Andy Simms, assistant warden and deputy director of studies at the Field Studies Council's Orleton Field Centre, Dyfed, hopes compatibility can be confirmed as he is anxious about the long-term consequences for the rock pool community in the bay should the starfish disappear.

"The removal of any organism can be a negative thing as the stability of the marine community living in these pools is inevitably weakened," he said. "It is rather like the house-of-cards effect, keep taking the cards away and eventually the whole thing will collapse."

"Whether or not the brooding cushion star is a keystone species has yet to be established, but one of the reasons this site is extremely special is because it is so rich in terms of biodiversity and it would be a great pity for that abundance to diminish."

Police fail test over stop and search

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

A dramatic reduction in the use of stop-and-search powers by police produced a better rate of arrest while maintaining crime clear-up rates, according to research published yesterday.

The results will put pressure on police forces to reduce the number of stop and searches, which have caused particular discontent among the Afro-Caribbean community following suggestions of victimisation of black youths.

In the first experiment of its kind, a comparative study between two similar Metropolitan Police divisions found that a 52 per cent reduction in Police and Criminal Evidence Act searches conducted in Tottenham, north London, produced a higher ratio of consequent arrests but did not appear to damage clear-up rates. In the other division, Vauxhall, south London, and nationally, searches increased during the study period, which ran from July 1995 to June 1996.

Numbers searched in Tottenham fell from 7,334 to 3,533. Although arrests also fell by 45 per cent, the proportion resulting from searches rose from 10 per cent to 12 per cent. Although similar in size, social and economic factors, police divisional strength and organisation, the numbers stopped in Vauxhall were 7,743—similar to the previous year.

Two key distinctions between the two areas appear to account for the wide disparity in the use of the power. During the study, which was conducted by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders for the Haringey Community and Police Consultative Group, anyone stopped in Tottenham

was given a leaflet explaining the police powers being used and the individual's rights. Those stopped in Vauxhall were not.

In addition, searches had been removed as a performance indicator in Tottenham, while the division had improved targeting of suspects and given a commitment to improve relations with the community. Searches remain a performance measure in Vauxhall.

The study found that 45 per cent of those searched in Tottenham were black, although black people account for only 24 per cent of the local population. Bernie Grant, Labour MP for Tottenham, said: "I have over argued that the police should not have the power to stop and search when they have real cause to suspect criminal activity. But unnecessary use of stop and search has now become so extensive as to amount to an abuse of civil rights."

David Gilbertson, a Metropolitan Police commander and formerly Division Chief Superintendent at Tottenham, says in the foreword to the report that the leaflet initiative had led to "a marked reduction in the level of stop and search without any appreciable loss in terms of effective policing".

Ann Dunn, one of the report's authors, said the leaflet "made some officers think twice about stopping somebody".

Tottenham's decision to scrap stop and search as a performance indicator in favour of a "quality, not quantity" measure is also likely to have played a significant part.

Stop and search was "a contact sport for officers", which was highly competitive between teams trying to outdo each other, one senior Tottenham officer told the researchers.

DAILY POEM

The Poplar and the Passer-By

By Vasko Popa, translated by Anne Pennington

They're widening the street
Clogged with traffic
They're felling the poplars

The bulldozers take a run-up
And with a single blow
Knock down the trees

One poplar just trembled
Withstood the iron

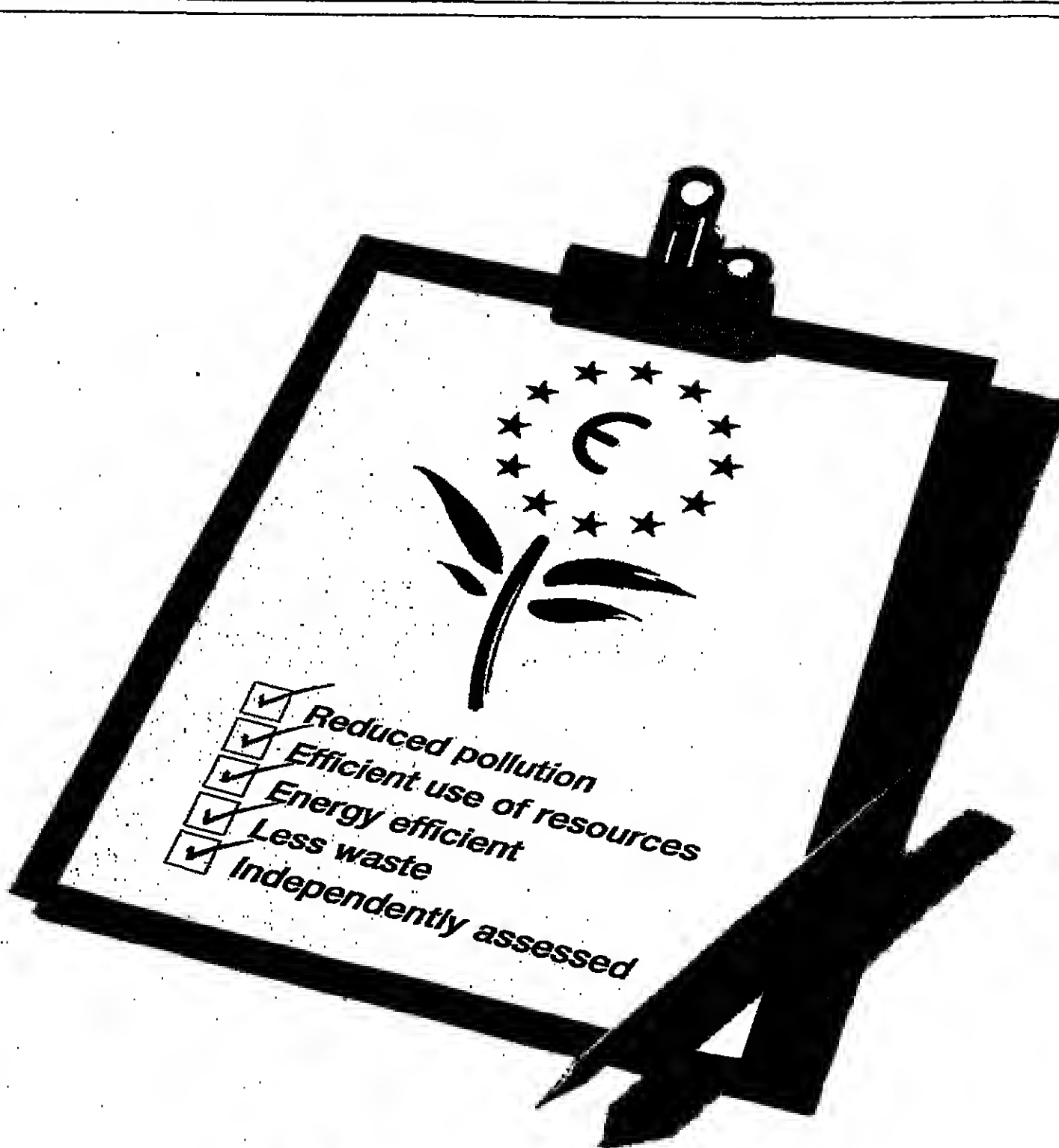
The bulldozer pulls back
From her noisy
Prepares for the final charge

In the huddle of passers-by
There's an elderly man

He takes his hat off to the poplar
Waves his umbrella at her
And shouts at the top of his voice

Don't give in love

Writing about the developing work of the Serbian poet Vasko Popa (1912-1991), Ted Hughes has called it "one of the most exciting things in modern poetry". Popa's *Collected Poems*, which first appeared in 1978 in Anne Pennington's translation, has now been revised and expanded by Francis R. Jones. It is published by Anvil Press at £25.



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news

Dounreay dilemma over shaft used for atom junk

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

A deep hole on a remote Scottish clifftop is one of Britain's two most awkward and dangerous radioactive sites. Yesterday its owners, the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), announced three more research contracts into how the Dounreay waste shaft can be made permanently safe. It has promised to present firm proposals to ministers by the end of this year. One option is to freeze the 300ft depth of the water-filled, vertical shaft. But, whatever solution is embraced, the highest priorities will be to eliminate the risk of a chemical explosion or a "criticality" - a runaway nuclear chain-reaction.

For 20 years, starting in 1957,

radioactive waste from Dounreay, on mainland Britain's northernmost coastline, was dropped into the shaft. A volume equivalent to a medium-sized house took the plunge. It has left Dounreay under intense criticism and would never be contemplated today.

In 1977, a hydrogen explosion blew the concrete lid off the shaft, scattering small quantities of radioactive material. Dumping ceased and ever since the shaft has been monitored for any build-up of explosive gas. Were that to happen, nitrogen would be pumped in to prevent a blast.

But this is not a permanent solution; for the next few tens of thousands of years, any escape of waste from the shaft would be highly dangerous. Unless a breakwater is built, and



Hot issue: Dounreay, the site of a clifftop waste receptacle that is one of the most perplexing problems facing the British atomic energy industry

Photograph: John Voos

that too is under consideration, the sea will breach the shaft in about 200 years. Only UKAEA's sealed-off Number One pile at Windscale, Cumbria, site of the 1957 reactor fire which was

Britain's worst nuclear accident, presents greater clean-up difficulties.

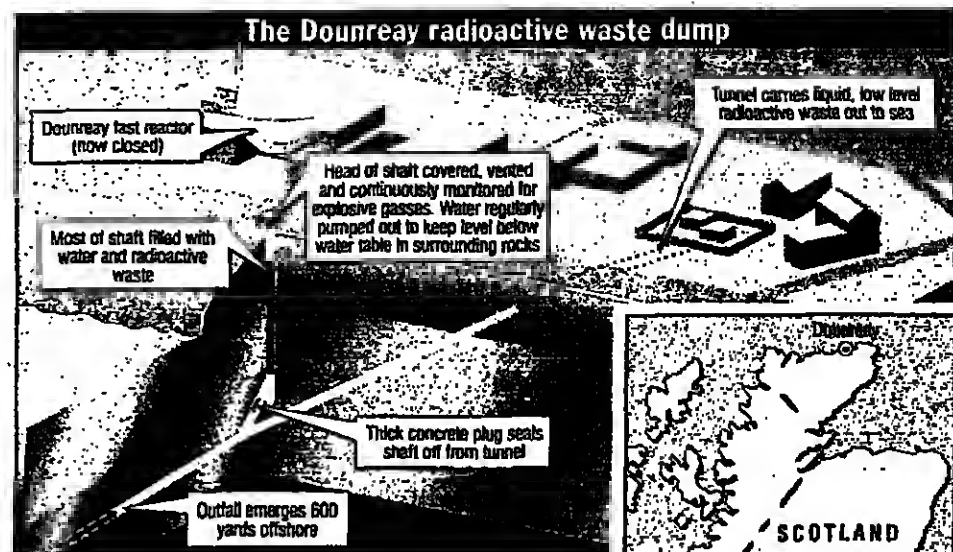
UKAEA's Dounreay director, Roy Nelson, said: "Clearly, the shaft is the most challenging

task we face here." A solution will cost hundreds of millions of pounds. Dounreay, 20 miles from John O'Groats, was where Britain spent 40 years trying to perfect the fast-breeder reactor, which turns uranium into plutonium "breeding" its own fuel.

Three reactors were built and all have shut. The programme was killed because of costs, but the site will employ hundreds of people and absorb billions of pounds into the next century. The 15ft diameter shaft was used to haul away rock carved out when a tunnel was bored out to sea, taking Dounreay's liquid low-level radioactive waste 600 yards offshore.

In the 1950s, permission was obtained to use the shaft as a dump for low and intermediate-level radioactive waste. A concrete plug was placed at the bottom to seal the shaft from the tunnel and the sea. Some 10,000 items were taken there from plants and laboratories around Dounreay in flasks. These would open and the waste would plunge into the fresh water which had seeped in. UKAEA has been combing old logs to find out what was dumped and has interviewed retired Dounreay workers.

Items as big as lathes went down the shaft. So did glove



boxes, used to shield workers as they manipulated highly radioactive materials. The 1977 explosion was caused by a mixture of sodium and potassium, the volatile coolant in fast-breeder reactors, inadvertently dumped in the shaft. The mixture reacted with water to produce hydrogen. All that was needed was a spark to ignite it and because sodium burns in air, that was readily available. It will take thousands of years for radioactivity in the

waste to decay to negligible levels. Making it safe in the long term may require pulling it out of the shaft and placing it in a permanent repository. It is too dangerous for people to do, so remote-controlled arms and grabs combined with closed-circuit television will be used. The worst nightmare is a nuclear chain-reaction beginning in a sludge of uranium and plutonium particles which may build up at the bottom of the shaft. Dounreay scientist Doug

Graham said such a "criticality" was inconceivable in the undisturbed shaft. But any technique devised for removing the waste would have to provide absolute assurance: no chain-reaction could happen.

While the ultra long-term solution will probably involve emptying the shaft, UKAEA is also considering interim solutions. One option is to bore holes all around it and pump refrigerants through these to freeze the water and waste.



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Manchester to get extra £43m for bomb damage

Extra government funding of £43m over the next three years to help rebuild Manchester city centre was announced yesterday by the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine.

Coming on top of a £20m grant from the European Union, the money brings to £63m public sector funding secured by Manchester Millennium Limited - the taskforce set up to oversee the rebuilding work in the wake of the IRA bomb explosion last summer, which injured more than 220 people.

Regeneration chiefs say that the £63m, together with a £20m bid submitted to the Millennium Commission to create a distinctive "millennium quarter", will "leverage in" more than £340m of private investment for the city centre.

The £43m announced yesterday by Mr Heseltine from London via a video link-up with planners in Manchester, will be channelled through the Departments of Transport and Environment.

The announcement was welcomed by the city, and by Labour's deputy leader, John Prescott, who was addressing a conference in Manchester.

Regeneration planners also unveiled their "masterplan" for rebuilding the city centre yesterday.

Mr Prescott said Labour backed the plan "in principle" - though final approval would depend on the "fine print". The £43m will go towards schemes including diverting traffic away from the city centre, new bus facilities, pedestrian and cycleways, and the creation of new public open spaces.

Richard Leese, leader of Manchester City Council and deputy chairman of Manchester Millennium Limited, said the financial commitment would ensure delivery of the plans within the three-year target.

"Now we have the masterplan, the commitment and the resources to start the rebuilding in earnest, the private sector will now have the confidence to invest," he added.

Price tag put on tests for head teachers

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Head teachers have told Labour it will cost £45m to fund a compulsory qualification for all head teachers. David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, has asked for a spending commitment for the full amount from Labour in return for his association's support for a compulsory scheme.

The Prime Minister and Tony Blair clashed in the Commons over head-teacher training last week after inspectors said 3,000 heads were not up to scratch.

A government-backed voluntary qualification starts this autumn, though John Major hinted he might consider making it a requirement for all heads. Labour has said its scheme would be compulsory.

In a letter to David Blunkett, shadow Secretary of State for Education, Mr Hart argues: "Since the Labour Party considers the national qualification of headship important, it must

be prepared to pay for all candidates. We estimate that there would be 15,000 candidates at a cost of £3,000 each or £45m." Failure to provide the money will worsen the difficulties already faced by many inner-city schools in recruiting new heads, he adds.

Mr Hart says the Government chose not to make the present scheme compulsory because of the cost. As a result, some heads will have to find the money from their own pockets.

Heads remain sceptical about the need for compulsion but Mr Hart says they could accept it if the Government provided all the funds and all candidates had the same opportunities to acquire it.

Secondary heads said changes to A-level to be announced today will cost £600m. A new exam, halfway between GCSE and A-level will be introduced to encourage students to sit a wider range of subjects. The Secondary Heads Association said staffing and exam fees would cost more because students would be taking more exams.

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Racial conflict: Calls for boycott by British liberals to support plight of black workers on slave wages rejected for now

SA wine growers sip at last chance saloon

Mary Braid
Cape Town

After weeks of vicious debate about racism, slave labour and immorality in the South African wine industry, the Cape wine fraternity finally agreed on something yesterday – no one wants the British to interfere by mounting a post-apartheid wine boycott.

The warning to liberal, well-meaning Britons is the latest

Platter exposed the exploitation of tens of thousands of Coloured labourers

twist in a saga which began last month when John Platter, the celebrated South African wine writer, lambasted the Cape's all-white wine industry establishment on BBC Radio 4 over its plans to share out 2bn (about £285m) to 5bn rand of assets, accumulated during the apartheid years, among 4,700 white farmers. Mr Platter exposed the industry's exploitation of tens of thousands of Cape Coloured labourers and its barbaric use of political and criminal prisoners as slave labour until the

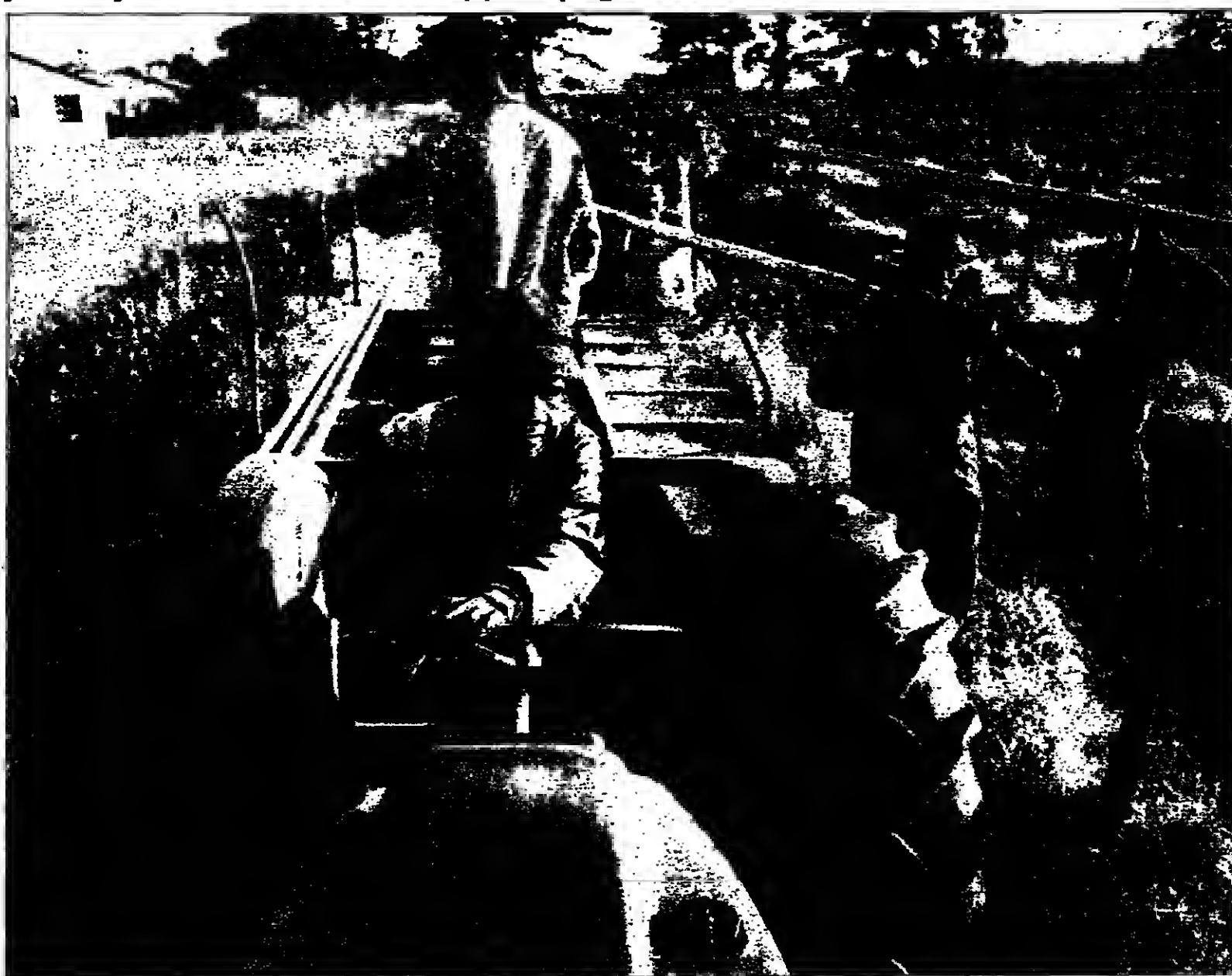
early 1980s. Yesterday, at his vineyard near Stellenbosch, he was taking nothing back. In a letter to the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Burger* last week he suggested the industry's restructuring – or privatisation – amounted to "looting" and denounced the move as out of step with attempts to redress the injustices of the past.

But he was furious at *Die Burger* reports yesterday associating him with suggestions in a British Sunday newspaper that a European boycott might be in order. "A boycott would be completely counter-productive to producers and labourers," he said. Worse, the boycott call obscures the real issues and gives white owners somewhere to hide.

At home, the KWV, the co-operative of vineyard owners which has proposed its own privatisation, has condemned Mr Platter and his wife Erica as traitors. Neighbours have burned copies of the couple's annual wine guide – the bible on South African wine – and local farmers are promising to mount their own boycott – of next year's Platter guide.

At the centre of the row are tens of thousands of Cape Coloureds who, three years after the end of white minority rule, still toil in the vineyards for as little as R100 a week – the price of two bottles of South African red or white in a British supermarket – and a daily *dop* (drink) of half a litre of wine.

According to Grant Twigg, the general secretary of the Farm Food and Rural Workers



Grapes of wrath: Workers at a vineyard in Paarl, near Cape Town. It is felt a boycott would hit them hard

Photograph: Jodi Bieber

Union, also a Cape Coloured, the daily wine quota keeps the vineyard workers docile and too dependent to leave the industry. Alcoholism, he claims, is deliberately encouraged by many farmers. He, like the Platters, argues that the workers have a right to share in the benefits accrued during the apartheid years.

Since the early 1990s, he says, the industry has seen some improvements but the vast majority of workers are still appallingly exploited, despite 6 per cent annual growth in the domestic market and a 38 per cent increase between 1995 and 1996 in overseas sales.

But he too rejects the idea of an overseas boycott. "During the years of apartheid my union supported sanctions," he said.

"But in this case a growing industry and particularly its workers would suffer."

The Platter camp is attempting to force KWV to live off a significant portion of the apartheid-era assets to transform an industry run by whites for whites. They want to bring blacks and Coloureds into management and ownership.

So far they have succeeded in persuading Derek Hanekom, the Agriculture Minister, to halt KWV's privatisation plans while an inquiry takes place. They argue that this is a rare case when doing the right thing is also good for business.

With blacks involved in the business, the pleasures of wine would be filtered through to the black community, and boost home sales. That is the dream

of Jubalane Ntongase, currently the only black manager in the Cape wine industry and a one-off in the South African wine trade.

Raised in Soweto, he learned the wine trade while in exile in New York. He began importing South African wines to the US in 1992 and finally returned to his native country in 1995, where he was hired by the white entrepreneur Dick Enthoven, owner of the Spier Wine Estate.

Mr Ntongase was employed to create a few waves, but like some "token" blacks taken on by big business, his month has proved bigger than his boss probably anticipated.

This week the heat is on. The Afrikaans papers are crammed with criticism and still Mr

Ntongase cannot stop talking. On a Sunday – a big day for visitors – on the Spier estate, Mr Ntongase sticks out; the only blacker blacks are serving in the wine shop or trailing an endless stream of little blonde girls around a large lawn on ponies.

The wine industry he describes is rotten with racism. He came back to South Africa to realise a dream. "When I was importing, my American customers always asked the same questions – how many blacks were employed in management of estates, how many black owners were there, how many black exporters were there?"

Of course there were none. He came home to change that; to open the business and the product up to blacks. Much is

made of professional whites leaving South Africa. Blacks who returned with skills, only to be hampered by white intransigence and invested interests, are somehow invisible. "If you mention black empowerment in the wine industry, everyone cringes," he says.

He is angry at recent comments by a KWV official that wine is always a white-dominated sphere, in any country. "That's just the sort of thing they used to say when I was growing up. It was the excuse they gave for not paying whites and blacks the same wages. 'Look around,' he added, gazing across the lawn towards another smart restaurant devoid of black visitors. "If I didn't work here as a black man I would never come in."

Dubious countries which shook off bad taste

James Roberts

For those whose greatest tipping pleasure comes from what they refuse to drink, rather than what they drink, times are getting hard. With the return of the fruits of the Cape to polite tables and bars, reasons for turning one's nose up at a particular bottle are almost exclusively confined to the effect of a wine on the palate.

Supermarket shelves are groaning with the produce of once-questionable countries of origin, such as Chile, Argentina, Bulgaria and Brazil. But no one gets much exercised about human-rights abuses by the government in Santiago before selecting a Chilean red, unless they confuse Pinochet with Pinot Noir. Few remember General Galtieri. The days when port was politically incorrect ended with the 1974 Portuguese revolution; Franco's death put Rioja back on the wine list; retsina came back when the Colonels went.

Bulgaria, it is true, has had some bad publicity recently, with demonstrators in Sofia demanding that elections be brought forward by a year or so, so that they can get rid of an unpopular and incompetent government, but we are still talking timing here, and not fighting for the right to have elections at all.

Only Romania has provided relief recently for conscientious abstainers, with OutRage! and Amnesty International calling on us to switch our brand loyalty away from Bucharest on the ground that the country's recently modified laws on homosexuality are still discriminatory.

The wines of the Commonwealth may offend some refined drinkers, but it is hard to see how they can be politically offended by, say, a Canadian Red or a New Zealand Chardonnay. The last great wine boycott was directed against France during its nuclear tests in the Pacific last year. Australia and New Zealand led the boycott and the impact on France's wine exports was significant.

The great escape.

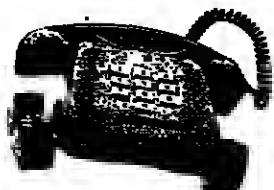
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The Ultimate Conversion

France's far-right rejoices in banal victory

John Lichfield
Paris

The ultra-right Front National captured its fourth French town hall, in Vitrolles, at the weekend with a promise to run the town for the French, and not for foreigners. Catherine Mégret, the victorious candidate, also promised to run things more cheaply and more efficiently than the Socialists, and to govern according to local needs, not national dogma.

Oddly, her first act as mayor will be to return to her suburban home outside Paris and hand over the government of Vitrolles to obscure, local National Front politicians and officials. Mrs Mégret, who was running on behalf of her disqualified husband, made it clear from the beginning that she wanted to be elected mayor, but not to be mayor. Bruno Mégret, second in command of the party nationwide, has no more interest than his wife in running Vitrolles, a failed experiment in concrete urbanism on the outskirts of Marseille. It will be left to a cabal of local FN supporters to govern the place, presumably following the example set by the three Front mayors elected in nearby towns in 1995.

The Front's municipal strategy, according to the party's chief ideologist – none other than Bruno Mégret – is to “banalise” the party's anti-immigrant, anti-establishment message: in other words to extend the FN's base by convincing voters that it is just



Winning wave: National Front candidate Catherine Mégret after her election victory at Vitrolles at the weekend, with her husband Bruno (right) Photograph: AP

another party, capable of running town halls more efficiently than the other parties.

So what is the FN's record in its other seats of power – Toulon, Orange and Marignane? Town government has not collapsed, as perhaps the Front's opponents might have wished. There has been no wholesale persecution of immigrants. There

has been no obvious gain in municipal efficiency either.

What there has been is a mixture of racist pettiness, political vindictiveness and censorship, mixed with the kind of cynicism which is rife throughout French local government. FN opponents – and some non-political locals – also complain of a rising

mood of racial and political intolerance, which they blame on the example set from the town hall.

In Marignane, next door to Vitrolles, the FN mayor, Daniel Simonpieri, claims to have cut taxes and spending. A local apolitical taxpayers' group points out that taxes may have fallen by a few centimes but

spending has, rather mysteriously, risen. One of the mayor's first acts was to abolish the

special, pork-free school lunch menus which had previously been provided for Muslim and Jewish pupils. It is this kind of in-your-face racial insensitivity which gives the lie to the FN's claim that it is not a racist party. (The official Front line is that it sup-

ports the rights of French people of all races over immigrants of all races.)

In both Marignane and Orange, 60 miles to the north in the Rhône valley, the FN-controlled town halls have ordered – in the name of “ideological rebalancing” – local libraries to stock far-right newspapers, periodicals and books, and to cancel subscriptions to allegedly ultra-leftist newspapers. These include *Libération* which is only just left of centre, and a leftist but respectable regional newspaper, *La Marseillaise*.

In Orange, three out of five social centres – those serving immigrant areas – have been closed. Town-hall employees have complained of an “atmosphere of humiliation, persecution and menace” directed against anyone who overtly resists the FN line.

In Toulon, the naval port east of Marseille, and the largest city under FN control, the party record of day-to-day management is poor. Local taxes have risen, despite the slashing of cultural and sporting budgets. The town's traditional Christmas distribution of toys to poor children was switched last year to a new organisation, which gave presents to “French children only”. The mayor, Jean-Marie Chevallier, described as “unfortunate” the invitation of a Jewish writer, Marek Halter, to the Toulon book festival.

Overall, the very fact that the FN is running towns may, as Mr Mégret hopes, “banalise” the party. But its record fails utterly to support its claim to be a respectable, pro-French but non-racist democratic movement.

Korzhakov wins seat in Duma

Anatoly Verbin
Reuters

Moscow — President Boris Yeltsin's hasty ex-bodyguard, who has promised to reveal the secrets of the Kremlin, broke into politics yesterday by winning a seat in parliament.

Alexander Korzhakov, a former close friend who is now one of Mr Yeltsin's fiercest opponents, won 26 per cent of Sunday's vote in the central Russian city of Tula, according to preliminary results.

The former KGB major took a leaf out of Mr Yeltsin's book for his aggressive campaign, bringing rock stars to the sleepy town and overwhelming the media with his advertising.

He emerged more than nine points clear of his nearest rival, local politician Eduard Pashchenko. Chess champion Anatoly Karpov was just behind in third place and Nikolai Novikov, a businessman who ran his campaign from a prison cell while awaiting trial for extortion, was fourth.

Some analysts predict that Mr Korzhakov will use the platform of the Duma and the immunity from prosecution enjoyed by deputies to step up his fight against Mr Yeltsin, who sacked him and other Kremlin hawks in June.

A close friend of Mr Yeltsin for 10 years, Mr Korzhakov has presented himself as a victim of a Kremlin plot and pledged to unveil “compromising material” against the establishment.

“I think he has enough material to make trouble for many Russian politicians,” said Andrei Piontkovsky, of the Moscow Centre for Strategic Studies.

Last May Mr Korzhakov said he wanted the presidential election to be postponed, putting him on collision course with the liberal Anatoly Chubais, then effective head of Mr Yeltsin's campaign. Mr Chubais, now Kremlin chief of staff, has been called a regent by Mr Korzhakov, who says he has assumed huge powers since Mr Yeltsin fell ill in June.

Mr Yeltsin dismissed Mr Korzhakov before July's presidential runoff, which he won, and ordered an inquiry into the general's activities. Mr Korzhakov fought back by going to court and accusing Mr Yeltsin of defamation. There has been no decision yet.

Television channels, loyal to Mr Yeltsin, attacked Mr Korzhakov in a bid to put the voters off, but the residents of Tula showed the nationwide tendency to favour the candidate seen to carry political weight in the capital.

Mr Korzhakov promised to use his inside knowledge of the Kremlin to help Tula, a former defence industry centre suffering from the end of the Cold War. Voters turned out for his pre-election rallies eager to hear some Kremlin gossip, but Mr Korzhakov remained tight-lipped, saying he would only spill the beans once he was elected.



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Albanian rioters seize port of Vlora

Andrew Gumbel

A furious crowd of anti-government demonstrators effectively seized control of the southern Albanian port of Vlora yesterday, stripping riot police of their guns, their riot gear and even their clothes as they rampaged through the streets demanding the resignation of the government and the return of money invested in failed "pyramid" schemes.

After five days of increasingly tense demonstrations in Vlora, the city descended into anarchy as gunshots rang out periodically, wrecked cars and oil drums were rolled out in the street and set on fire and piles of rubble and police uniforms were amassed and turned into giant bonfires.

At least three people were reported dead and around 100 injured, almost all hit by stones. One of the dead was shot in the back and died on the operating table at the city hospital. The two others were said to have

died of heart attacks, but at least one of them was seen admitted to hospital with blood running down his face and body following a severe beating.

The uniformed police, who numbered no more than 100, were no match for the fury of the crowd. Many of them ran into side alleys, where the luckier ones were offered shelter in private houses and the rest had their clothes torn off them piece by piece. Others took refuge on the city rooftops and attempted to intimidate the crowds by dropping stones into the street.

The demonstrations in Vlora were the direct result of the collapse of Gjallia, the latest of Albania's pyramid investment schemes, which was based locally. In most of the rest of the country, the population has been cowed into fearful silence by a wave of arrests and beatings, but in Vlora the government now seems to have lost any semblance of authority. The port is a booming Mafia



Hot work: A plainclothes and a riot policeman push a demonstrator towards a fire during street clashes yesterday in Vlora

Photograph: AP

town, the main entry and exit point for contraband including cigarettes, guns, drugs and immigrants en route to Western Europe, so it is used to considering itself above the law.

People across the country believe the government took an active part in the pyramid schemes and was responsible for

duping people into believing that they could continue paying extravagantly high rates of interest to investors.

As many as a million Albanian households — effectively the entire country — are believed to have committed money to the schemes.

President Sali Berisha and his

government have been entirely unsuccessful in deflecting blame for the crisis, and their promises to pay back some of the money have done little to quell public dissatisfaction.

It is not clear whether the rest of the country will be inspired to follow Vlora's example, or whether the real crunch will wait

until the biggest of the pyramid schemes, officially still in business, are declared bankrupt in their turn.

The government has offered to open talks with the opposition, but the offer has been overshadowed by a climate of fear in the capital, Tirana.

Dissidents and opposition

politicians have been systematically intimidated and attacked in the past few weeks, and on Sunday the leader of the small Democratic Alliance party, Neritan Ceka, was whacked across the face with a truncheon in a Tirana cafe and some of his friends dragged outside and beaten.

China elevates HK leader

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

Tung Chee-hwa, the leader of Hong Kong's first post-colonial government, is said to have been given state leadership status by China's ruling Communist Party. This places Mr Tung in a category normally reserved for those at or above the position of Politburo members or vice presidents.

A report in the *Hong Kong Standard* newspaper yesterday stated that Mr Tung had been selected to join this select group by the Communist Party in Peking. Mr Tung's office refused to comment on the report.

Circumstantial evidence, such as the level of the reception Mr Tung receives when he is in China, and his treatment in China's state-controlled media, suggest that the report is sound.

It means that Hong Kong's new leader is theoretically able to rub shoulders with China's president and Communist Party general secretary Jiang Zemin, and even the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping since the term "state leader" is bestowed on holders for life.

The designation of Mr Tung as a state leader also confirms the very high level of importance the Chinese leadership is attaching to the resumption of sovereignty on 1 July. It may mean that Hong Kong's new leader has considerably more clout in Peking than the average provisional leader.

On the other hand, attacks on state leaders are treated as subversion in China. If this is applied to criticism of Mr Tung, it will represent a considerable diminution of freedom of speech to Hong Kong where abuse of leaders is routine, and when, at a recent demonstration, an effigy of Mr Tung was burned for the first time.

Reuters — Hong Kong's largest foreign community, the 146,000 Filipinos who work mainly as maids, received assurances yesterday that they would not lose out after the British colony reverts to China. Jose de Venecia, a Philippine congressman, said he obtained the assurances during a meeting with Tung Chee-hwa.

Japan beckons to an impoverished 'Queen Mary'

Tim Cornwell
Los Angeles

Deborah Prussel speaks of the *Queen Mary* with a sense of patriotic ownership in a vessel that was once the pride of British shipping. It is bad enough that the 61-year-old liner is now the back drop for dockside bungee-jumping. "Queen Mary must be turning in her grave at that one," she said. But worse, far worse, is the notion of floating the one-time Second World War troopship to Tokyo Bay, 30 years after her final voyage, for use as a gambling den.

Ms Prussel and other residents of Long Beach are up in arms. An acrimonious meeting is promised tonight

when the Long Beach city council meets to consider the proposal of a local businessman Joseph Prevratil to send the *Queen Mary* to Japan.

Mr Prevratil operates the ship as a floating hotel under lease from the city, and says the trip would raise cash for urgent repairs. But residents fear the *Queen Mary*, gutted of her engines when Long Beach bought her as a tourist attraction in 1967, could sink.

Even if Mr Prevratil could pull off his scheme, they are worried she will never come back. "We don't want her going to Japan, pure and simple," said Mrs Prussel, a board member of the Long Beach Historical Society. "There are serious concerns about whether she would make it."

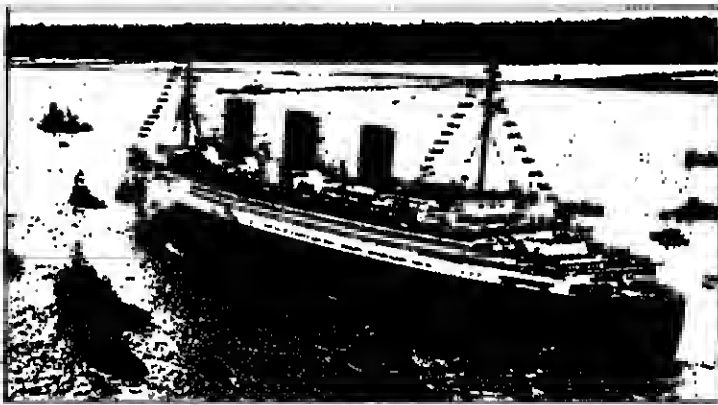
The *Queen Mary* was launched in 1936 by the Cunard-White Star line, and soon established the world record for the fastest Atlantic crossing. She boasted excellent food and celebrity passengers well into the Sixties, but by the end of the decade she was losing money, and before the journey to California her fittings were auctioned off. According to Mr Prevratil, her electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning systems are on their last legs. She has swallowed up \$100m (\$62.5m) in private and public money.

Mr Prevratil, 59, announced his plans at a news conference in the ship's grand ballroom late last month. Sending her to Japan for just three to five years would raise an urgently need-

ed \$40m, he said. The ship was so seaworthy, he insisted, that Lloyd's of London was prepared to insure it.

Under Mr Prevratil's stewardship the *Queen Mary* last year turned a profit for the first time. All of the ship's 365 rooms are now open, at prices from \$50 to several hundred dollars, with two award-winning restaurants.

But the ship has also become part of the landscape in Long Beach. It is host to many functions, and it is part of social and official life. Sitting at the mouth of the Los Angeles River, it is virtually impossible for a visitor to miss. Many are reluctant to see it go, including city councillor Mike Donegan. "It would leave a black hole if it was gone," he said.



The *Queen Mary* leaving Southampton for the last time 30 years ago, set for her new role as a Long Beach tourist attraction

Memories of 1982 cloud Israel's Lebanon dilemma

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

A measure of Israeli divisions over what to do about Lebanon is a furious row between right-wing leaders over Israel's disastrous invasion of its northern neighbour in 1982, which left 650 Israelis and 13,000 Lebanese dead.

General Ariel Sharon, a member of the present government who was minister of defence 15 years ago, is suing the Israeli daily *Haaretz* for saying that Menachem Begin, then the Israeli prime minister, had lied to him about advancing all the way to Beirut.

Giving evidence against General Sharon is Ze'ev Begin, son of the former prime minister, who told the court that his father, who died in 1992, had given his assent to a more limited operation. Mr Begin, who resigned from Israeli cabinet over the Hebron withdrawal last month, said his father denied General Sharon's claim to have told him that Beirut was the initial objective. He said his father "was very angry," and said: "These things are baseless."



Menachem Begin: Believed General Sharon lied

General Sharon has always been held responsible by the Begin family for the invasion which led to Menachem Begin's resignation. It is also true, however, that the prime minister gave his defence minister full backing in his bombardment of Beirut and the capture of the city. The massacre of more than 700 Palestinians at Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps by Christian militiamen allied to Israel discredited the invasion internationally. Israel has never wholly recovered in Lebanon from the debacle. It failed to achieve any

of its aims of marginalising the Palestine Liberation Organisation, reducing Syrian influence in Lebanon and establishing a Christian Lebanese government allied to Israel. In the face of guerrilla attacks, Israeli forces pulled back to a nine-mile-wide security zone in south Lebanon in 1985.

Last week's collision of two helicopters, in which 73 soldiers and airmen were killed on their way to outposts in Lebanon, has given impetus to the debate about whether Israel should withdraw. Yossi Beilin, the architect of the Oslo accord, suggested that control of the security zone be handed over to a third party. The problem with this is that Syria will not let Israel off the hook in south Lebanon without an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, captured in 1967.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, the chief of staff, oppose a pullout but do not have any alternative strategy to propose. A senior officer was quoted as saying: "The public debate now being carried out that concerns an IDF [Israel's army] withdrawal from Lebanon

negatively affects the morale of the officers and soldiers serving in the south Lebanon sector."

The prolonged bombardment of Lebanon by Israeli artillery and planes in operation Grapes of Wrath last year failed to inflict significant damage on Hizbollah guerrillas. The US-brokered ceasefire stopped Katyushas being fired at northern Israel, but also stopped Israel freely using its advantage in firepower against Hizbollah. No civilians have been killed on either side for six months. Expansion of the security zone or attacks on Syrian positions in Lebanon would lead to renewed Katyusha attacks.

The several hundred Hizbollah guerrillas Israel faces in Lebanon have proved highly effective. Even in a skirmish at the weekend, in which a three to five man Hizbollah squad was intercepted by Israeli troops, the result was seven Israeli wounded, one seriously, and no evidence of any Hizbollah casualties. The trickle of Israeli casualties, totalling 68 dead in the last three years, makes it difficult for the government to persuade the public that it has no option but to soldier on.

Landslide win for Sikhs in Punjab

Jawed Naqvi
Reuters

Chandigarh — A Sikh party was poised yesterday to rule India's Punjab state for the next five years after a landslide victory in the first peaceful elections in nearly two decades.

The Akali Dal, led by the former chief minister, Prakash Singh Badal, and its ally the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won an overwhelming four-fifths of the 117 seats in the state legislature.

"The Hindus dominate the cities. The BJP is their major mouthpiece. Sikhs dominate the countryside," said Ashis Nandy, an analyst at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi.

It was a significant win for the Sikh party, which won a dominant 74 seats after boycotting the last Punjab elections in 1992. The state's ruling Congress party was reduced to only 14 seats.

Some 69 per cent of the state's 15 million voters had turned out for Friday's polls, in sharp contrast with 1992 when 22 per cent voted in an election overshadowed by Sikh separatist violence.

Arrival, pro-separatist faction of the Akali Dal won just one seat in yesterday's final tally. Its leader, former police official turned militant, Simranjit Singh Mann, was defeated.

Mr Badal, 69, is expected to take office as Punjab's chief minister later this week.

The rich farming region border-

ing Pakistan has been rocked by years of guerrilla violence. Analysts said the Akali Dal's poll alliance with the BJP offered Sikhs and Hindus a chance to overcome the distrust. "The Akalis never encouraged militancy. They were soft on the militants. The militancy was the handiwork of groups which were opposed to the Akalis," Mr Nandy said.

The landslide victory should reduce pressure on Prime Minister Deve Gowda's United Front alliance, analysts said yesterday. The once-monolithic Congress Party governs only six of India's 26 states and has been reduced to a reluctant supporter of the country's fractious ruling centre-left coalition.

The analysts said Congress was expected to scale down its

frequent threats to topple the United Front alliance, which took power last June, and force mid-term elections at the national level.

"The Congress will simply have to pause," said Surjit Grewal, a political analyst in Punjab's capital, Chandigarh. "The lesson in Punjab is that the Congress is extremely unpopular here. The scene can't be much brighter for it in other regions."

Akali Dal leaders said the Punjab election also held a lesson for the BJP. "The BJP should now realise the benefits of having the support of minorities," said Akali Dal spokesman Kaurwajit Singh. "I do believe the party has to seek a policy of moderation if it truly wants to govern India."

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It's hard, but Labour must target Del boy



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Jack Woolley doesn't look like a Labour voter. With his little Ambrose business, he seems the typical Tory, straight from the village green and warm beer of Major's little England. Del boy is hardly a Blairite either. Rodders and Uncle Albert conceivably stray from their Peckham council estate to vote for Harriet Harman, but surely not Del. That self-made spiv, self-reliant and competitive, ducking the rules and regulations of big government, makes an aspirational Thatcherite. Even Ronnie Barker's Arkwright, his Yorkshire corner shop open all hours, appears no friend to the red flag or red rose.

Assuming our soapy heroes reflect our national culture, things do not look good for Labour's latest, campaigning venture. Winning the hearts and minds of small businessmen and women, as Labour claims it wants to do, will not be easy. The cultural objections to Labour run deep, and certain genuine policy differences remain.

Nevertheless, the appeal is worth making. For a start, Labour cannot afford to be too out of touch with the growing band of Trotters and Woolleys in the world. There are too many votes at stake. But even if Mr Blair and Barbara Roche, his small business lieutenant, cannot turn many votes, they will still improve their ability to govern all of us well if they address themselves seriously to small business concerns.

Rural and urban, uneducated and pro-

fessional, no matter how different their social background, small businessmen and women have always seemed to have one thing in common: voting Conservative. Loathing big government, fiercely self-sufficient and competitive, they formed the bedrock of the parties of the right throughout Europe. The little retailers and the petty bourgeoisie kept the socialists out in France for almost a century. In Spain they helped keep Franco in power. Little business people and left-wing (or even centrist) governments do not seem to go too well together.

But Tony Blair cannot afford to forget them. He needs their votes. Three and a half million people are self-employed. As the world of work gradually changes, as companies downsize and out-source, increasingly the people who once laboured together in unionised workplaces are striking out alone, under contract to their old company. The old Labour voters, shaped by common experience in the factories, are disappearing. If the votes of small businessmen and women seem important now, they will matter far more in future. Labour cannot afford to ignore the lingering perception that it is envious of success, hostile to aspirations, and disapproving of an independent competitive spirit.

Moreover there is no good reason why the interests and values of hard-working small business people should be out of kilter with a left-of-centre party. Del lives in a cramped council flat. His son

Damien will have to face Peckham's schools, while Rachel could go out to work and boost the family income if she could only afford good child care. Expanding the opportunities of the little people, defending them against the powerful economic interests (be they big contracting companies or stubborn trade unions), giving them and their children a fair chance to succeed, should all fit neatly within a centre-left framework.

But the economic case for wooing small businesses is even stronger. Rodney and Uncle Albert depend on Del for their living. Half the private sector work force now have jobs with companies of

fewer than 100 employees. The tired cliché that small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine of growth remains true. Squeeze little entrepreneurs and you squeeze the economy. Even if small business leaders insist on disliking Labour values, a Labour government would have to persist in helping small businesses flourish.

For the most part, Labour policies should be perfectly acceptable to small businesses. Pursuing economic stability, cutting red tape, providing small business support all sound comforting enough. Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade, has issued similar warm words

himself. In one area Labour actually has something positive and distinctive to offer small businesses above and beyond current government policies: a statutory right to interest on late payment. For the countless little companies that suffer, scrap and save, waiting for their bills to be paid by the big bullies who are collecting interest on the balance, this could mean the difference between profit and going under. Perhaps there is substance to Labour's claim that surveys show small businesses now prefer Labour to the Conservatives.

But the sticking point for many small shopkeepers, pub-owners and business entrepreneurs remains the minimum wage. For a small firm with few employees, wavering on the edge of closure, paternity leave, statutory holiday entitlements, and minimum rates of pay all hinder their chances of survival. Tony Blair will well remember answering questions from small business owners (possibly genuine, possibly Tory stooges) who phoned television and radio programmes during the 1992 election to insist that Labour's proposed minimum wage (then £3.20 an hour) would force them to lay off half their staff. Faced with an almost tearful boarding house owner, convinced she will not be able to make ends meet, it is hard to argue that a minimum wage will not cost jobs. The fact remains that some small businesses that survive and compete only through paying staff abysmal rates will be squeezed

out of the economy. Labour should not flinch from admitting this. Some small businesses will not get a great deal from a Labour government, nor should they. Sustaining an enterprise on the back of poverty pay is not acceptable, no matter how much the entrepreneur may want to keep going.

Our economy must be able to afford to do better. Understanding the interests of small business is the right way to run a government; pandering to their every plea is not.

Hard work and other options

Talking of successful small businesses... the best small businesses of all are those that don't stay small for long, and catapult their successful entrepreneurial owners into the hriming ranks of British millionaires. We now have 81,000 people worth more than thousands of thousands of pounds. Good luck to them - or, at least, to the ones who made it through hard work.

But consider the new millionaires who made money awarding themselves share options on the back of privatisation. And spare a thought for the growing numbers of their employees who aren't paid a minimum wage. Are we sure we're getting the balance quite right?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nato marches east into a great blunder

Sir: "Nato's planned expansion is not inherently threatening to Russia. Given the right circumstances, it should go ahead." So writes Tony Barber ("Forget the Bear, look to the Balkans", 6 February).

Russia does see Nato enlargement as "inherently threatening" - and a betrayal of commitments made by John Major and James Baker at the time of German unification. Clearly "circumstances" aren't right now, but without a proper European security architecture in place, they never will be.

George Kennan is only the latest in a row of British and American former ambassadors to Moscow to warn that "expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation would be the most fateful blunder of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era" (*International Herald Tribune*, 6 February, reprinted from the *New York Times*).

That President Clinton gave promises to Polish and Czech constituencies in the US during his electoral campaign does not bind the rest of us to commit a great folly.

The antagonism the proposal is giving rise to is preventing most of Europe's real problems being addressed. Of which one is, as Tony Barber points out, the future of the Balkans - on which side of a new iron curtain would they fall? Above all, "Nato enlargement" is not free-standing: it is messing up most of the existing and intended arms-control treaties; it is related to, but so far un-coordinated with, European Union expansion; it is likely to be very expensive, but its funding has not been considered; above all, it belongs within the European security framework that the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe provides.

President Chirac, returning from his visit to Mr Yeltsin, has suggested a five-power summit meeting in April for the leaders of the United States, France, Britain, Germany and Russia to discuss Europe's future security system. Which sounds right. Our common European future cannot properly be left in Mr Clinton's hands alone: for that he has, and can have, no democratic mandate. ELIZABETH YOUNG London W2

Sir: Paul Valley ("How Blair can save billions on defence", 10 February) may well be right to say that substantial savings in the defence budget would be possible if Britain either faced up to its dependence on the United States or joined up to a common European defence policy. However, neither option appears realistic, certainly in the near-medium term.

I disagree with Paul Valley's conclusion that there are "not many more efficiency savings to be made". Significant delays and massive cost overruns in the procurement process persist, and poor MoD management still wastes large sums.

But the more fundamental issue Labour's review would need to address is the balance between commitments and resources. If our armed forces are overstretched and becoming "hollow", and we are not going to increase their numbers, then we must reduce their



commitments. If Britain wants an army rather than a gendarmie it must allow it the opportunity to train as such: if it wants to sustain high morale amongst service personnel, it must honour minimum standards of intervals between operational duties.

There is a danger that we are concentrating too heavily on high-profile new pieces of hardware and neglecting the essential support of that equipment in warfare. What is the point of sustaining hundreds of shiny new tanks if the minute you need to actually use them three-quarters of them do not work, as was discovered before the Gulf War?

Dr STEPHEN PULLINGER Executive Director International Security Information Service London WC2

Survival guide for aid workers

Sir: The recent news that aid workers have been taken hostage by rebels in Tajikistan comes on the back of the tragic news that two aid workers - one Cambodian, one British - have been killed whilst working for the United Nations in Rwanda. These events once again highlight the often dangerous position that aid workers find themselves in.

Because of this, and other factors which relate to the welfare of aid workers, eleven UK aid organisations have come together to form People in Aid, funded by the ODA. The group will address concerns about the recruitment, vulnerability and high levels of stress of aid workers, particularly in

disaster and conflict situations. On 19 February, we will be publishing a Code of Best Practice which seeks to set a quality standard for the management and support given to aid workers in the field. SARA DAVIDSON People in Aid London SW1

Commerce moves to the Internet

Sir: Your recent articles on the Royal Bank of Scotland and Nationwide offering Internet services to their customers (22 January and 3 February) highlight one of the most dramatic changes taking place in the financial services sector - electronic commerce.

IBM research to be published shortly, shows that 72 per cent of insurance executives interviewed believed that electronic commerce will have the most profound impact on reshaping the insurance industry.

Another IBM research project carried out last year, again with insurance executives, highlighted a scenario whereby consumers will actively identify, acquire and manage their portfolios of risk and capital accumulation needs - a simple task in a world where a growing number of access points such as the Internet means everyone is "wired". Increasingly sophisticated consumers will send out requests for coverage over a

growing number of access points such as interactive TV and the Internet. They will piece together the necessary product or service components from global providers.

Sadly, there are still many financial service companies who, despite having Web sites, do not have the adequate strategy to maximise opportunities via the Internet and time is running out for them fast. There are currently around 50 million worldwide users of the Internet and it is estimated that this will rise to 1.5 billion by 2010. JOHN MOON Distribution Solutions Manager IBM Insurance Europe Feltham, Middlesex

A formula for fair wages

Sir: The political hot potato of limiting high-fliers' salary increases and the soon to be resurrected debate over guaranteed minimum salaries could easily be cooled by a statutory requirement that within any organisation the highest remuneration should not be higher than a prescribed multiple of the lowest salary.

This would give flexibility to an employer but would ensure that, regardless of the total amount available for salaries, the division of that amount would always be such as to reflect the contributions made by all employees. This principle could hold good for both

commercial companies and government departments. The only arguments would then be to determine the correct multiplier (20, 30, 50?) and for middle-earning employees to justify their division of the remainder. A P DZIMITROWICZ Croydon, Surrey

British Empire begins at home

Sir: I hope the new Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol will find room for a more thoughtful account of the term "British Empire" than is apparent from Peter Popham's description (article, 6 February).

For much of the "500-year history" to which the museum's curator alludes, "the British Empire" meant not far-flung dominions but the rule and sovereignty first of England itself, then later of the British Isles in their various political constitutions. As the great G M Young observes, this older sense, with no particular overseas reference, prevailed as late as the 1830s, when McCulloch's *Statistical Account of the British Empire* gave more space to Oxford than Canada (*Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*, p32). It is not until 1857 that we find Thomas Hughes, in *Tom Brown's School Days*, celebrating that Empire "on which the sun never sets".

For Henry VIII in 1533, the "realm of England" was "an empire" because that meant it was "free from the authority of any foreign potentates". Today, when the constitution of the United Kingdom is in question, and half England is roused by a perceived European threat to "British" sovereignty, these less glamorous domestic aspects of imperial history have as great a claim on our attention as evocations of the comparatively brief period when maps of the world were covered in red. ALAN MacCOLL St Andrews, Fife

Neglect of a colossal work

Sir: I read with interest David Chesterman's letter (5 February) on recent performances of symphonies in London. I too am struck by the apparent neglect of Beethoven's Second Symphony. I can see no good reason why this fine work should have slipped into relative obscurity.

The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, in its review of the symphony's premiere in April 1803, describes it as "a singular, colossal work, with a depth, power and artistic erudition such as very few works command".

One could not agree more. The symphony shows the first real emergence of the power and beauty of Beethoven's music, which was to surface fully in his later works. Let's hope it does not drift further into obscurity. Dr C E IAGUS Mossley, Lancashire

Sperm ruling has ancient echoes

Sir: The Court of Appeal's ruling in favour of Mrs Blood's campaign to have a child using her deceased husband's sperm (report, 7 February) has been hailed as a victory for "common sense". It can also be seen as a victory for "family values".

Amongst the ancient Hebrews, and in many patriarchal societies around the world, death does not terminate marriage. A dead man's brother stands in for him, taking his widow as partner, in order to produce children (ideally sons) in his name - a practice known as "levirate", from the Latin *levir*, "brother-in-law".

The presumption here is that men seek to perpetuate themselves through their heirs. They are not expected to leave oral, far less written, legal instructions recording their consent - as the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority appears to require. From this wider cross-cultural perspective, the authority's intervention here seems a bizarre intrusion into what are strictly family issues. T M LEWIS Emeritus Professor of Anthropology The London School of Economics and Political Science London WC2

Help mentally ill out of ghetto

Sir: At last, a sympathetic and unprejudiced analysis of the crisis of mental health provision in this country (leading article, 5 February).

I am a student, and I also happen to be mentally ill. I am distressed by the almost entirely negative approach of the press. Coverage is biased towards the infrequent violent cases, personal accounts of sufferers are rarely published, and local newspapers are reluctant to publicise horrendously long waiting-list times.

I have had the "luck" to be able to compare the services in three countries: Egypt, Germany and Britain. My experiences and research lead me to agree with your diagnosis. There are cases of depressed children and teenagers in our inner cities who, even after they have attempted suicide, have been put on a three-week waiting list to see a psychiatrist. Some do not survive until their first appointment.

I am living in a grey world of fear, which is haunted by unwanted spectres and thoughts. And I am not alone. Many other people in similar and worse positions than me are feeling ghettoised and stigmatised by society. What we need is a full, frank and empathetic discussion about the chronic underfunding in the mental health sector. TASHA DUFFY Manchester

Fresh spin

Sir: The ideal place for wind turbines is not in our National Parks nor out at sea, nor on London's rooftops (letter, 5 February). It is at Sellafield, Torness and Sizewell.

They're all in windy places with already ugly buildings, not where people want to go bathing - and the transmission lines are already there. Maybe they'll help Nuclear Electric make a profit - or is it against their principles to use a safe source of power? A A KRATKEWZ Lambley, Nottinghamshire

Post letters to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number. Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

analysis

How can Britain meet the need for another four million homes? Build more new towns, the doyen of planning tells Peter Popham

What with the tree people and the tunnel people, Swampy and Animal and the rest, a hasty scanning of the newspapers may give one the impression that development is something which in this country is no longer possible, that every new road or housing estate, every attempt to nudge history forward as opposed to rolling it back, will be met by the thunderous coalition of young eco-warriors and middle-aged Nimbies.

So to hear someone speak out in favour of full-blooded development policies, in favour of a whole panoply of new towns and villages, served by incredibly fast new rail networks but also, no doubt, by some new roads, is rather shocking: like bumping into an advocate of caning or whaling or paedophilia.

But when the person in question is Professor Peter Hall, doyen of British town planners, former chief planning adviser to Michael Heseltine at the Department of the Environment and now chairman of the Town and Country Planning Association, one sits up and takes notice.

Tomorrow evening at the Royal Institute of British Architecture in London, in a debate entitled *City, Suburb or Country - Who Cares?*, Professor Hall will explain why he thinks a large number of new communities will not merely be desirable in the next 20 years, but imperative. In his view, sizeable new communities are going to come into existence, willy-nilly, and they will come about in a far more coherent and harmonious manner if they are planned. And he will explain how the arrival of TGV-speed



In the next 20 years, the creation of new communities will be an imperative, says Professor Peter Hall. But there will be opposition from environmentalists - and the Nimby tendency

Milton Keynes multiplied

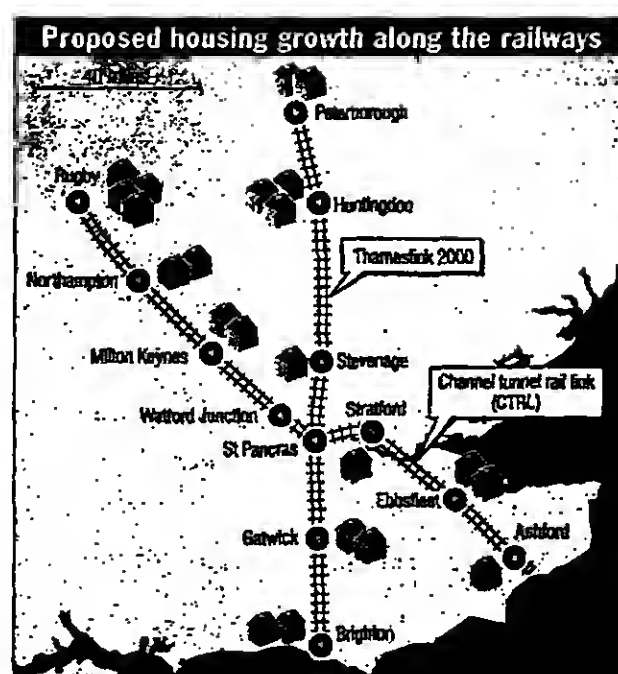
trains in south-east England to serve these new communities will also have a powerful regenerative effect on existing towns and cities that now are deep into their various limbo and twilights.

The trigger for these bold imaginings was the prediction last November by John Gummer, Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, that by 2020 Britain will be confronted by the need to house 4.4 million new households. The bulk, 80 per cent, the DoE believes, will not be young couples but single-person households: young people of student age, the divorced or separated, and older people who have outlived their spouse or partner. However constituted, it is a formidable number of households to accommodate. It is an irresistible force. But it is headed straight for an immovable object, namely the Nimbyish tendency with which Gummer, who represents a rural constituency and lives in a vicarage in Suffolk, is on terms of intimate familiarity.

Deeply in thrall to the absol-

utist ruralism of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Gummer seeks to deflect the irresistible force on to a new (and, praise the mark, fashionable) terrain. Rural England shall remain sacrosanct: if Gummer gets his way, 60 per cent of those 4.4 million households will be decanted into housing in so-called "brown field" sites in the cities - areas of redundant industrial or office buildings, contaminated and derelict land, and so on, which can be converted to residential use.

By suggesting that this is the solution, Gummer has grabbed the coat tails of a real and important trend, namely the revival of the inner city not only as a place to work and play but as a place to live: a historic reversal of the drift to suburban and country living that has been in progress for more than a century. Warehouses and factories, outdated office blocks and ex-seamen's hostels have been imaginatively adapted to residential purposes over the past 10 years, and the trend continues: recently this newspaper's former home north of



the City, an unprepossessing Fifties office block, was converted into luxury apartments. Peter Hall does not deny this tendency; indeed, he seeks to encourage it. But he flatly denies that it can provide the answer to the needs of Gummer's 4.4 million households. "In the South-east, the projections suggest that more than one-third out of the 1.7 million new households should be crammed into London. But the space is simply not there," Hall insists. He estimates that the most promising brown field site in the capital, Thames Gateway (formerly known as the East Thames Corridor), might take 30,000 new homes. "One has to wonder where exactly the remaining 599,400

homes are actually going to be built," he says.

As Professor Hall sees it, there will be no alternative to building new towns in the countryside. This is the nifty that we must grasp. And the good news, in Hall's view, is that certain entirely fortuitous developments in the railway system will make the attainment of what he calls "the sustainable social city" far more capable of realisation than the rest of us in our premillennial gloom are likely to suppose.

Two simultaneous but unrelated rail developments are the key. One is the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) being built by London and Continental Railways, on which Hall has been a consultant since leaving

the DoE in 1994, which, if and when sufficient investment is attracted, will now extend to Rugby and Northampton as well as connecting the Kent coast with London.

The other element is called Thameslink 2000, to which Railtrack is committed, which will connect Cambridge and Stevenage to destinations south of London. "It will be a very sophisticated service," says Hall, "with trains which will be coming from as far away as Bedford and Kings Lynn feeding into a new station at St Pancras and feeding out to the south coast. It will be a relatively high speed service, with trains travelling at up to 110mph. What you will see with these two schemes is a high-speed metro service of a kind that has hardly existed in the world up to now."

These two new high-speed rail links will provide the infrastructural spines for the new communities Hall envisages. The model for such a development is even now taking shape along the route of the CTRL between St Pancras and the Kent coast, in the East Thames Corridor. It was Heseltine's (and Hall's) vision of how the arrival of a high-speed rail link from the Continent could be exploited to revive that huge swathe of land, from London's East End to decaying seaside resorts such as Margate and Ramsgate, that has been in the doldrums for the past 30 or 40 years. According to Hall, the realisation of this plan shows that it is a mistake to think new town type developments are a thing of the past.

"If you look at the stuff that's going on in Thameside, Kent is really remarkable. Both the

county council and the local Dartford council are very pro-development in that area and they have revived the development plan. They've even taken substantial land out of the green belt, the sacred cow of the British planning system. There will be fights even down there - all the tree people and the tunnel people will come out of the trees and into the tunnels. But in general in Thames Gateway, within the corridor, there isn't that opposition."

The idea that urban planning is no longer possible in Britain, that it is a thing of the past, dates from the mid-Eighties: the fact that Mrs Thatcher wanted to get rid of planning was translated into the public perception that she had in fact done so. This impression has been heightened by the apparent anarchy of developments such as Canary Wharf in London's Docklands, which sprang up on her watch.

But, as Hall tells it, Thatcher's trusty nose for survival caused her to backtrack from her ambition to abolish planning, when she realised that to do so would be electorally risky. "Although Maggie Thatcher would undoubtedly have liked to shut the planning system down, and almost said so, she never succeeded. Planning, as a negative device, which it has always really been in many areas - defending the rural areas - was actually allowed to survive because trying to dismantle that protection would have

just had them out of office." Professor Hall proposes to give us a new crop of the doyen of England, full of new towns and villages. Because he is a notorious optimist (it's a rare and refreshing quality), he convinces us that it is going to happen; that the social forces which fuelled the new town movement after the war did not turn on again like a tap.

What the towns will look like is another matter. In a book he wrote in his youth, *London 2000*, first published in 1963, Hall envisaged a metropolis of "beautiful, tree-lined ways", tall buildings clustering around all the major railway stations, vast pedestrian areas separating traffic from people. Today, while insisting his vision was at least half right, he offers more circumspect advice on describing specific styles or plans for the next 20 years.

Whether the new communities Professor Hall describes will be truly sustainable is a tough question, so-called Ebenezer Howard's garden city idea, which has inspired Hall throughout his career, was meant to be self-contained and sustainable, but, as Hall admits, all the garden cities and new towns became commuter bases almost as soon as they were built.

True sustainability may as yet be no more than a pipe-dream, a pious desideratum, which acquires a nasty tinge of authoritarianism. (Give hell stay put! don't drive!) when anyone tries to put it into effect. But on one point, Hall is clear: however imperfect a planned solution to the problem of Britain's exploding households may be, it will be far more satisfactory than an unplanned one. "If you don't provide adequately, through a coherent regional plan, I think there are going to be two consequences. You'll get a lot of development anyway, but it will be far worse than if you'd done it properly. You'll get fights going on everywhere, grudging releases of land, probably in the wrong places, not well related to transport, and it will be far worse for everyone than if you had done it properly."

"The second fact is that if you release the land too slowly, the real victims will be the low-income people, who are dependent on social housing, because the market will always operate to give the people with money what they want. The social housing providers won't be able to get the land they need to build the social housing. By it will be in the worst possible locations: crammed on contaminated land, badly located, next to noisy railways or roads."

Utopianism may be beyond us these days, jaded as we are. But we can still recognise dystopias like this when they appear on the horizon. The question is whether government will have the vision and resolution to take steps to avert them.

A high speed rail link will revive swathes of land

All at sea with the feel-safe factor

Whether or not Michael Howard ever gets the power to place bugs on unwitting people, we now know that unauthorised bugging of suspicious people already takes place.

I can actually give you an example. For the past few weeks a bugging device has been placed experimentally in Michael Howard's office at the Home Office. Nobody knew it was there except, of course, my mole who put it there in the first place.

Judge for yourself whether it was a worthwhile experiment from these extracts from conversations on the tape, chosen carefully at random by me.

TAPE EXTRACT ONE

Mole: Testing, testing, testing. One two three... Prison works! Put everyone behind bars! Hang the cost! And hang everyone else as well! Right, let's see if that's working... **Playback:** Prison works! Put everyone behind bars! Hang the cost! **Mole:** Perfect.

TAPE EXTRACT TWO

Isa: What's this meeting going to be about?

2nd Aide: Search me. He

can't be announcing more prisons, can he? There's nowhere left to put them.

1st Aide: Oh, come on - Howard can always think of somewhere else to put more prisoners. On floating hulks, in old holiday camps...

2nd Aide: Underground at road-building protests...

Isa: What is this mania he has to put everyone behind bars? Hold on - here he comes...

Howard: Right, gentlemen, without further ado let's get down to business. And we only have one piece of business in front of us. Winning the election!

1st Aide: With the best will in the world, sir, it is no part of a civil servant's brief to help win an election.

Howard: To win the election we have to make people feel they're safe with us. I call it the feel-safe factor! And to do this we have to put various feel-safe factors into operation, such as cracking down on illegal immigrants and keeping Myra Hindley in jail for ever.

2nd Aide: Isn't there a danger that this may turn people in her favour, sir?

Do people really think that if she is let out now, she is going to roam the



Miles Kingston

countryside killing people? I mean, not even OJ Simpson has reoffended...

Howard: Are you disagreeing with me?

2nd Aide: No, sir. Merely pointing out...

Howard: And another thing. If we can pin-point a public enemy for people to hate, that will also bring people on our side. I want you to find out who, in the last year, has committed the most offences in British courts. And name him publicly.

1st Aide: But...

Howard: Do it, you recalcitrant bastards!

Sound of slamming door.

1st Aide: Well, I don't know about you, but I thought he

was in an unusually good mood today.

TAPE EXTRACT THREE

Only the two aides are present.

1st Aide: Well, the Myra Hindley announcement hasn't materially altered the opinion polls.

2nd Aide: John...

1st Aide: Yes?

2nd Aide: Has it ever occurred to you that Myra Hindley and Michael Howard have the same initials?

1st Aide: No. But why should that...

2nd Aide: Well, the Home Secretary seems to have a bit of an obsession with her. I just wondered if in some strange way he is identified with her, in a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde sort of way.

1st Aide: The dark side of the moon... the evil side of his own character... In their own ways, Hindley and Howard have tried to put away as many people as possible...

1st Aide: Are you going round the bend?

2nd Aide: Maybe. Sometimes I think I've been here too long...

TAPE EXTRACT FOUR

Howard: Well, any progress on the naming of the worst offender of the year?

1st Aide: Yes, sir. We ran a

search on the name singly most criticised by the courts and... well, had luck, sir. It's you, sir.

Howard: ME?

2nd Aide: Yes, sir.

Apparently you have been more ruled out of order and in contempt of the law than anyone else this past year.

1st Aide: Shall we put out a press release to that effect?

Howard: No, no... Just make the announcement that I am buying lots of floating prisons.

1st Aide: Yes, sir. Incidentally, why are we doing this?

Howard: Because I want to win the next election and I don't want prisoners voting against us.

2nd Aide: But, sir, prisoners don't have the vote anyway.

Howard: I'm taking no chances! I'm putting all the likely Labour voters in offshore prisons so that they lose their residential right to vote in Britain as well! Now, move!

Slamming of door.

1st Aide: Well, what do you say to that?

2nd Aide: Roll on the election, I say.

More tape extracts soon, unless an injunction descends on my mole.

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A dangerous game to play with Scotland's future

Stephen Dorrell yesterday threw away the politicians' election rule book. By even implying that a future Tory government might repeal legislation setting up a Scottish Parliament, he has set a dangerous precedent for his party.

First, he may have given himself a lifelong reputation for Anglo-centric arrogance by threatening to overturn the wishes of the Scottish people as expressed in a future referendum. Second, he sacrificed one of the main advantages of incumbency by being drawn into discussion of how the Tories would behave in the supposedly non-negotiable event of a Labour victory.

But third, and potentially most nerve-racking of all, he exposed his colleagues to an almost limitless series of supplementary questions between now and polling day: what else are they planning to unstick when they return after a putative Labour term in office? Scrap the minimum wage? Remove the European Convention of Human Rights from British law? Hand back the windfall tax? Restore hereditary peers to the House of Lords?

Given that Mr Dorrell has strayed, by way of an interview in *The Scotsman*, into this perilous territory, and given that this ferociously ambitious politician is not in fact an idiot, it's worth asking why he did it. Be suspicious of the term "gaffe". It is part of the small change of party politics. But it frequently describes something more revealing, and certainly more interesting, than mere error.

Gaffes are sometimes more premeditated than they look, and even the most serious ones usually happen for a reason. The reason why Mr Dorrell took the risk he did, however unsuccessfully, lies in an inevitable inconsistency at the heart of the Government's approach to the issue of devolution.

For ministers have been relentlessly apocalyptic about the outcome of a Scottish Parliament. Almost in passing, John Major said at his press conference on 7 January that devolution would have "lit a fuse" to an independent Scotland and a direct conflict between the Edinburgh parliament and Westminster. But Mr Dorrell, now appointed Mr Major's whip-chief-general on the Constitution, has hinted at even darker consequences.

In a speech to the Centre for Policy Studies in November, Mr Dorrell proceeded a long way towards the "blasted pages of history" and saying that "the last time the British resorted to the use of force to resolve their domestic political differences was nearly 250 years ago... It is precisely their record on continuous evolutionary change which is now under threat from Labour's wide-ranging series of half-baked ideas for the constitution."

In his *Scotsman* interview, Mr Dorrell's only qualification of this was to admit that devolution "need" not lead to civil unrest. But you can still script the scaremongering party political broadcast now.

Cue Edinburgh, circa 2001. The Labour Party in Scotland, paying the price for the Blair government's deep unpopularity, has been heavily defeated in mid-term elections to the Scottish parliament and a result the SNP is now the biggest single party. Reinforced by a small group of rebel Labour MPs, it has secured a vote in favour of independence in an Edinburgh Parliament which is now in direct collision with the Blair government's insistence that under the terms of the 1998 Scotland Act, Westminster remains sovereign and Edinburgh has no powers to declare UDI. There is clever footage of Belgrade-style demon-



Donald MacIntyre
It doesn't help the Tory case to suggest what is patently implausible: that a future Tory government would scrap the Scottish parliament

strations in the Royal Mile. We see English students at Scottish universities having their rooms ransacked by angry mobs. There have been hundreds of arrests and British troops have been called in to help the police to enforce order. Headlines in the normally sober *Scotsman* and *The Herald* are predicting civil war.

But there is a big problem for those painting the nightmare scenario, beside the obvious point that Scotland has not resorted to civil disorder during 18 years of having legislation imposed upon it by a government it never voted for. Which is that the Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth last year admitted, with commendable honesty, that it was "fantasy" to imagine that a future Conservative government could turn the "omelette" of a tax-raising Scottish assembly "back into eggs". In other words, the Tories would not dream of repealing a Scottish parliament. And, of course, few, if any, Scottish Tories think otherwise.

Ian Lang, who is even closer than Mr Dorrell to Mr Major, took exactly the same view - in private - when he was Scottish Secretary. And that was before Labour committed itself to the referendum which now makes repeal politically impossible, at the very least without another referendum. And understandably so. One of the reasons that, back in the Seventies, Mr Forsyth and Mr Lang both strongly believed in a devolved assembly was precisely that it could be a vehicle for a Tory revival in Scotland - a country, after all, in which as recently as the Fifties a majority of MPs were Conservative. And that, as they both know very well, still applies.

So that was the problem (one that he himself had played his part in creating) that Dorrell was, perhaps subconsciously, trying to solve: if the Scottish parliament is so catastrophic, why are the Tories pledged to keep it in being?

And it's why, instead of warning that devolution would lead inevitably to a reduced number of Scottish MPs at Westminster, or reduced per capita funding, or whatever, he chose to hint at repeal. But in doing so he not only held out what on any sensible expectations must be a highly unlikely prospect, to put it politely, he cut directly across the skillful act that Mr Forsyth has been running in Scotland, inconsistency or not: devolution will be a disaster and what's more, you'll be stuck with it. Indeed one danger for the Tories about Mr Dorrell's remarks to *The Scotsman* is that they may, if anything, make anti-devolutionists feel more about voting Labour. After all, if it all goes wrong, that nice English Mr Dorrell will come back and scrap it.

Labour's devolution plans remain open to debate; the West Lothian question - namely, whether it would be justifiable to keep a disproportionately high number of Scottish MPs in Westminster voting on English-only legislation, when English MPs would no longer be voting on similar Scottish legislation - hasn't itself been answered by Tony Blair's sensible decision to promise a referendum. There will be continuing disagreement over whether the Scottish Parliament will cement the Union or bring independence closer - as, for their very different reasons, Alex Salmond, the SNP leader, and John Major both claim. But it doesn't help the Tory case to suggest what is patently implausible, that a future Tory government would scrap a Scottish parliament. The sensible course for Mr Major would be to stand Mr Dorrell down and leave the Labour bashing, at least as far as Home Rule is concerned, to Michael Forsyth.

Polished poetry and glittering prizes

by Ruth Padel

ICICLES ROUND A TREE IN DUMFRIESSHIRE

We're talking different registers of vulnerability here. These icicles aren't going to last for ever suspended in the ultraviolet rays of a Dumfries sun.

But here they hang, a frozen whirligig of lightning, and the famous sculptor I think of in Nevada, at work on the obscure moonsweep of a painted desert.

who scrambles the world with his tripod for strangers as a nature, got sunset to fill them. Can't be comfortable.

a double helix of opalescent fire staling round your bark down string on which a sculptor spiraled

and welded icicles, working all day for that Mesopotamian magic of last light before the dark.

stunning a suspended helter-skelter with horizontal rays, turning it to a mist-carousel from the House of Diamond,

a spiral of Pepsodent, darkening to the blue shadowfrost of cedars at the Great Gate of Kiev.

Why it makes me think of opening the door to you

I can't imagine. No one could be less of an icicle. But there it is - having put me down in felt-up

in the mystical appointment book, you shoot that quick inquiry-glance, head tilted, when I open up,

like coming in's another country, a country you want but have to get used to, hot from your *bal masqué*.

making sure that what you found before's still here: a spiral of touch and go, lightning

licking a tree, casting itself as Aretha Franklin singing "You make me feel like a natural woman" in *basso profundo*

and firing the bark with its otherworld ice the way you fire, lifting me off my own floor, spiced round your trunk as that tree gyres

up at an angle inside the lightning, roots in the orange and silver of Dumfries. Now I'm the lightning now you, you are,

when you pour yourself round me entirely. No who's doing what and to who, just a tangle of spiral and tree.

You might wonder about sculptors who come all this way for a thing that won't last.

You know how it is: you fever a day, a whole life. Then the light's passed, you walk away to the Galloway Paradise Hotel.

Pine-logs, cutlery, champagne - OK, but the important thing was making it. Hours, and you don't know how it'll be.

Then something like light arrives last moment, at speed reckoned only by horizons: completing, surprising with its three hundred thousand

kilometres per second. Still, even lightning has its moments of panic. You don't get icicles catching the midwinter sun

in a perfect double helix in Dumfriesshire every day. And can they be good for each other, lightning and tree?

It'd make anyone, wouldn't it, afraid? That rowan'd like to sleep and wake up in your arms but's scared of getting burnt.

And the lightning might ask, touching wood, "What do you want of me now we're in the same atomic chain?"

What can the tree say? "Being the centre of all that you are to yourself, that'd be OK. Being my own body's fine

but it needs yours to stay that way." No one could live for ever in a suspended gleam-on-the-edge, as if sky might tear any minute.

Or not for ever for long. Those icicles won't be surprised any more. The string blew away. Glamour left that hill in Dumfries.

The sculptor went off with his black equipment. Adzes, twine, leather gloves. What's left is a photo of a completely solitary sight

in a book anyone can open. And whether your touch at the door gets forgotten or turned into other sights, light, form,

I hope you'll be truthful to me. At least as truthful as lightning, skinning a tree.



Photograph: Ross Wood by Andy Goldsworthy (Waring, C40)

Poets are minor carnivores, preying on their own (and everybody else's) vulnerability. Vulnerability is poetry's stock-in-trade. Now a poem about it has won me first prize in the National Poetry Competition: an unenviable-looking £4,000, half of it tax-free. (Only half, because I entered myself. If my publisher had done it, it would be all tax-free).

Weird. It's not what poems usually do. You work away obsessively several days then tinker over weeks, alternately thinking "This is great!" "What a mess." Then suddenly it doesn't want you any more. When a poem wins something you look at its words (I now know) with a new eye. They take up the same space on a microchip, but how much is each worth? I tried to work it out but got dizzy. If I had cut a word, would the ones left be worth more?

Poems don't get that sort of money. They get a bit, never commensurate with work done on them: £25 plus a poetry magazine; £100 from a national newspaper. Four thousand pounds is incommensurate the other way.

I nearly didn't send this poem in. It took a month after seeing Andy Goldsworthy's sculpture in *The Independent* on Sunday to beat into any shape,

putting someone at ease with Bollinger by calling for stout. "We'll exchange it for a bit." But I'll stick with the pen.

"Avoid bearing down too hard when writing," says its instructions. I couldn't part with a pen that tells me that. It has a "special highly expressive nib" and describes what you've always wanted to know: "the ideal writing position." The mystical filling instructions include a drawing of an aeroplane. "Always fill your pen completely before travelling by air." Mont Blanc, you see, knows poets write flight-poems under the influence of tree spirits.

My pen has a white marigold at the tip, is "designed to fit comfortably in the hand" (Andrea was afraid it might be too big for mine) and "provide a lifetime of writing pleasure". To men, apparently - the illustrations have a man writing to his mate. Bob, about strenuous chess problems. The nib, "advanced with intricate platinum inlay", has a "handmade tip of iridium alloy, finer than gold and significantly harder than steel".

Wonderful. Wonderful. But I'm worried I might start writing like a man. "The poet Joachim Ringelnatz gave this pen his ultimate tribute." This phrase (echoes of *Funny Bird*) means a four-line address to his awe-inspiring tool.

My pen wants to be polished with a jeweller's cloth, an attention you could give words instead. I always got C five handwriting and have never had a mature relationship with any ink-filled object. I'm not their type, I suppose. I'll learn. I've had it five days now but had too much work (on a laptop) to begin with proper awe. One day, I'll fill it.

A real pen, first prize out of 7,000 anonymous poems, money to fill your overdraft - this is what people dream of when they try an Arvon poetry course or a workshop listed in the pages of *Poetry London Newsletter*. (Catch the launch-reading for the next issue, on 27 February, in London's most spookily glamorous venue, the Old Operating Theatre.) You'll have to write differently now," says Chris Meade, helping me look at my pen.

Chris runs the Poetry Society, its crimson basement, the Poetry Map on the Internet, the award-winning Poetry Café. Well Chris, thanks for everything. When I write now I promise I'll try not recommended positions, and not bear down too hard.

MALE

FEMALE

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1st March 1997

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THE INDEPENDENT IT IS. ARE YOU?

Easier to find servants than entrepreneurs

The first of a new series dispelling the economic nostrums on offer from the political parties

It is the Government's favourite mantra, one of the most irritating and empty phrases ever coined by a speech writer. "Britain is the Enterprise Centre for Europe." Not only does it sound like an over-literal translation from a foreign language, a phrase from one of those glossy promotional brochures that overseas tourist boards like to hand out. It is also untrue.

Well, this conclusion does perhaps involve loading the phrase in question with more meaning than it can bear. Does it mean that Britain has more entrepreneurs than anywhere else in Europe? Or that entrepreneurs from around Europe like to take their holidays here?

This might be logical, but ministers' repetition of the phrase suggests that they want it to signify something more important. It indicates a belief that the British economy is more successful than most because of its entrepreneurship. Unfortunately there is not much evidence that this is so.

The rate at which small businesses start up looks impressive, but their failure rate is almost as high. Not many small companies grow up into big ones. Think of some of Britain's best-known and most successful entrepreneurs. Anita Roddick's Body Shop is one of them. More than 20 years old now, it is only the 302nd biggest company listed on the stock market.

Richard Branson runs Virgin, one of the highest private companies in the

UK, and one of the best-known internationally. There is no doubt that it is one of Britain's biggest entrepreneurial successes. But the airline Virgin Atlantic makes up most of the business and accounts for most of the profit. The more exciting and innovative Virgin businesses are tiny.

The recent huge international successes might not be Continental, but they are not British either. The giants of enterprise, such as America's Microsoft and Netscape, or Germany's Siemens and Bosch, completely outshine the small British technology firms.

Research by Warwick University's Centre for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises shows that in a six-year period the number of new businesses that survived amounted to only 1 per cent of the total number of all companies. This puts Britain behind Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland as an enterprise centre.

That leaves, as the most solid footing for the Government's claim, the notion that overseas investors like to build their factories in this country rather than on the Continent. Inward investment in the UK has indeed been running at record levels. One catch, however: we have to go over the fact that outward investment by British companies has also reached a record level, with the UK investing twice as much abroad as abroad is investing here.

The UK's success in attracting for-



by Diane Coyle



ign investors also relies on the lure of labour that is cheap for its level of productivity and skill. Others can play the same game, with Ireland and Spain inside the EU and the Czech Republic and Poland on Germany's eastern border offering stiff competition on the same territory.

Besides, to focus on the activities of foreign manufacturers gives an entirely misleading impression of the force driving the British economy. Britain is Europe's domestic service capital.

Yes, servants. When it comes to domestic staff, the UK has been creating jobs like nobody's business. Fallen City star Nicola Horlick is not alone in employing nannies and cleaners. According to official statistics, domestic service has been the fastest-growing sector of the economy since the trough of the recession five years ago, up by more than a third in terms of activity. This puts it ahead of various other rapidly expanding and possibly entrepreneurial industries such as air transport, computer services and telecommunications.

What's more, experts predict it will continue to be the fastest-growing area of employment. Warwick University's Institute for Employment Research predicted recently that the main areas of employment growth between now and 2001 will be professional occupations and administration on the one hand, and "personal and protective services" on the other.

This latter category is a mixed bag of jobs which includes domestic services, but also carers, private security guards and people serving fast food. It is the McJobs bit of the economy, with much of the work part-time or temporary, and almost all of it low-paid.

There are already more employees in this category, at 2.75 million out of a workforce of nearly 26 million, than in the professions, working in factories or working as salespeople. The report predicts that employment in personal services will grow by more than 4 per cent a year compared with declining employment in a majority of the other occupational categories.

According to Rob Wilson, editor of the Warwick University study, one explanation for the trend is the shrinking importance of manufacturing, which now makes up less than a quarter of the economy in this country. That means that whatever new jobs there are will be in the service industries. But within services, he says, "the way work is organised has tended to polarise between occupations requiring higher qualifications and unskilled jobs".

Britain's increasingly *Upstairs, Downstairs* economy could pose real social problems. As Dr Wilson points out, an increasing number of households are existing on very low pay. The UK has already seen since 1980 the biggest rise in earnings inequality in the industrialised world, making it the undisputed inequality centre for Europe.

business & city

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National Express is preferred bidder for ScotRail franchise

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

National Express, the coach and rail group, was announced yesterday as the preferred bidder for ScotRail, which runs trains north of the border.

The decision marks the end of the franchising process after a year of activity in January saw four franchises sold off in one day. Civil servants admit that the impending election has

forced the pace of the sell-off.

The only remaining franchise in public hands is Regional Railways Central, which runs services from Wales to East Anglia. Managers from First Bus and National Express were meeting last night to present their final bids. A decision is imminent.

ScotRail's service will be heavily regulated by the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority, which is expected to rubber-

stamp the decision a week on Friday.

National Express beat off rivals Stagecoach, the bus and rail group, Prism, the quoted train company, a management buy-out bid and a consortium including Go Ahead bus group.

ScotRail presented civil servants with many problems. Stagecoach was thought to stand little chance after officials announced it would be referred to the Monopolies and Merg-

ers Commission if it won. Although the bus company has a 20 per cent share of the Scottish bus market, Brian Souter, the company's executive chairman, said his company would not have bid if there had been insurmountable problems.

The Scottish rail service generates more than £110m in ticket sales, but also requires a substantial subsidy of more than £240m - mostly to keep its "socially necessary" routes going.

ScotRail could have proved politically difficult to sell as councillors were initially opposed to the sale. However, Patrick Hetherington, the Opra official handling the sale, managed to talk round most of the sale's opponents.

Labour-controlled Strathclyde PTA was also instructed by party officials not to delay the letting of the franchise. The party leadership was concerned that having a single train oper-

ating company in the public sector could become a political embarrassment after a Labour victory.

National Express has already successfully attracted passengers on its Midland Mainline services carrying passengers from London to Leeds with innovative new fares and is now one of the largest groups controlling Britain's railways.

With ScotRail, which is the company's fourth franchise, the

company's rail team will have met senior managers' target of a passenger revenue stream of £300m.

The group has ambitious plans for ScotRail, including new rolling stock and a refurbishment programme. The company is also considering building a new station at South Dalgely in Fife and looking at plans for an airport link from Glasgow airport to the city centre.

ScotRail will prove a difficult railway to run. Almost half its

revenue comes from the Strathclyde area, where ticket prices are largely controlled by the passenger transport authority.

However, a high frequency service between Edinburgh and Glasgow could attract passengers from the congested motorway that links the two cities.

The leisure market, analysts predict, will be another profit centre. ScotRail runs the Forth & Clyde sleeper service, and many of the highland routes.

Bank increases pressure on Clarke with renewed demand to raise rate

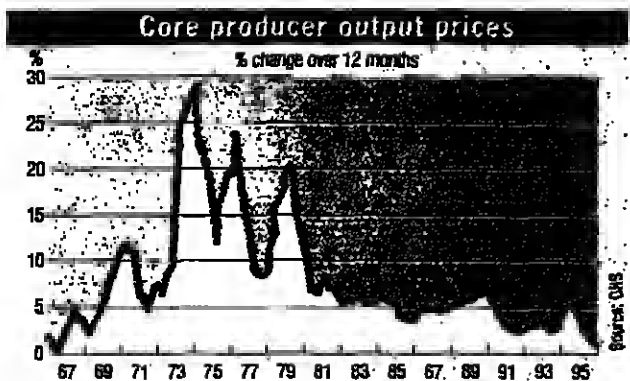
Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The Bank of England is poised to raise the stakes in its clash with Kenneth Clarke with a renewed demand, in its Inflation Report tomorrow, for interest rates to rise. But the Chancellor is now widely expected to put politics first and avoid increasing borrowing and mortgage costs before the election.

Treasury officials admit privately that the Chancellor has not paid any attention to their internal advice for some weeks. "We don't know ourselves what he's going to say when he goes into the monthly meetings," said one.

Some Treasury officials, like the Bank of England, believe that the strength of the economy means base rates ought to rise to keep inflation on course for its target in the longer term.

One Treasury adviser, "wise person" Tim Congdon of Lombard Street Research, went further yesterday. In a report to clients he wrote: "British monetary policy is deviant and irresponsible, just as it has been



remained below last summer's rapid pace.

The British Retail Consortium said the strong pound meant tourists visiting London were doing less shopping. Food and drink sales were weak but the sales performance in other areas was good. Andrew Higgins, chairman of the BRC's economic affairs committee, said: "The latest figures point to a healthy picture for the economy as a whole. The value of retail sales has now stabilised."

Separately, official figures yesterday showed that the increase in "core" prices charged by manufacturers was 0.6 per cent in the year to January, the lowest rate of inflation at the factory gate since 1967. Output prices rose 0.3 per cent during the month before adjusting for normal seasonal variations - a very subdued increase at the time of year when manufacturers usually push through increases in their list prices.

A decline of 0.6 per cent in the price of raw materials in January, in large part due to the strength of the pound, helped explain the extremely good output price-inflation figures. This took them to a level 6.2 per cent lower than a year earlier.

Analysis in the City said the latest economic news had vindicated Mr Clarke in the eyes of the financial markets.

"These figures were truly excellent from the Chancellor's perspective," said David Owen, an economist at Kleinwort Benson. "The exchange rate is clearly having a bearing on the economy."

Michael Dicks, UK economist at investment bank Lehman Brothers, said: "The Bank of England will have to make out the case for ignoring the rise in sterling since its last Inflation Report. It will not be as persuasive this time around."

Although some City experts agree with the Bank - and Treasury - view that base rates should go up now for the sake of the longer-term inflation target, most expect to see very favourable inflation figures for the next few months. "Short-term there is no reason to worry about inflation," said Kevin Darlington at Hoare Govett.

on so many occasions in the past. It will lead over the medium term to higher inflation."

However, recent weakness in some of the monthly economic statistics has given Mr Clarke plenty of ammunition. The Chancellor could not conceal his delight at figures yesterday showing that inflation at the factory gate had fallen to its lowest for a generation.

"As I was driving to work this morning the producer price data were released, which were staggeringly low," the Chancellor said. In a speech yesterday

he said economic prospects were the best in living memory.

Mr Clarke said the recovery had reached all regions, which meant it could be sustained for longer. "It means the economy can sustain higher levels of activity without running into inflationary buffers," he said.

There was additional support yesterday for his decision not to increase interest rates after last week's monetary meeting from a survey of high street retailers. This showed that retail sales growth picked up last month after a weak December but

G7 view of exchange rates boosts dollar

The dollar gained ground after an early dip yesterday as financial markets absorbed the meaning of the weekend's communiqué on exchange rates from the Group of Seven (G7) industrial countries, writes Diane Coyle.

An upbeat annual report on the economy from the White House's Council of Economic Advisers confirmed the market sentiment that the underlying state of the US economy warrants a strong dollar.

The G7 statement said "major misalignments" in exchange rates the ministers had decided to tackle in April 1995 had been corrected. This was seen as a signal that they would be unhappy if the dollar strengthened very much further

against the yen and mark, but equally were not about to intervene in the foreign exchange markets.

The view that the dollar's recent appreciation reflects economic fundamentals was boosted by yesterday's Economic Report of the President, which saw no sign of recession on the horizon. "There is no foreseeable reason why this expansion can not continue," it said.

The tone of the report, issued each February, was extremely optimistic. "The ability of the economy to sustain low unemployment and low inflation is the best it has been in years," it said, claiming that the rate of unemployment below which wages and prices would start to

pick up had fallen and could decline further.

US unemployment has been below 6 per cent, the rate which economists used to think marked the start of the inflationary danger zone, for more than two years. The Council of Economic Advisers is in good company in its view that the so-called "natural" or "non-accelerating inflation" rate of unemployment has fallen.

The Council concluded that the economy's potential growth rate is higher than the 2.3 per cent average predicted for the next five years. "The administration does not think that 2.3 per cent real growth in the long term is the best the US can do. The outcome could be even better."



Andrew Regan: Thought to be keen to buy some of the Co-Op's non-food interests

Lanica suspended amid muddle over Co-Op deal

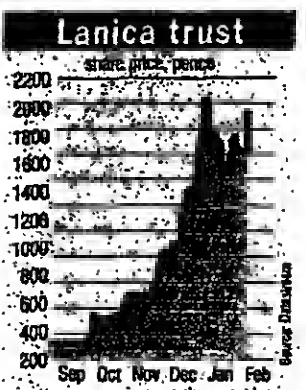
Nigel Cope

The strange tale of Lanica Trust, the tiny investment vehicle, took a fresh twist yesterday when dealings in the company's shares were suspended ahead of a planned approach to the Co-Operative movement about buying some of its non-food operations.

The suspension followed volatile early trading in Lanica shares which saw the stock soar a further 313p before dealings were halted at 1.950p. The surge was the latest in a series of wild movements in the shares which were trading at just 116p last September when 31-year-old entrepreneur Andrew Regan bought a controlling stake.

The Stock Exchange said it will be seeking further discussions with Lanica but had not launched a full scale inquiry. In a bizarre sequence of events the shares were suspended before Lanica had held a single conversation with the Co-Op about a possible £500m deal and before the Co-Op was even aware of the interest.

But after news of Lanica's intentions leaked over the weekend, the Gurnsey-registered group was forced into issuing a



statement to the Stock Exchange yesterday. It said it had sent letters to the chief executives of both the Co-Operative Retail Society and its larger sister, the Co-Operative Wholesale Society saying it wished "to discuss the possible purchase of the certain non-food business of the societies".

Lanica's advisers said its ap-

proach had received a "very courteous response".

This view was at variance with a tersely worded statement from the Co-Op which rejected Lanica's overtures outright. It said: "The CWS has today written to its members giving them an assurance that the CWS has not been in discussion with Mr Regan, does not have the details of what his aspirations are and has no plans to dispose of CWS businesses or assets to him or his investment company."

The Co-Op said it had received no contact from Mr Regan before yesterday's approach, not even a telephone call. "The first [the CWS] learnt of his impending approach was via a leak to a newspaper," it said.

Mr Regan, the son of Spring Ram chief executive Roger Regan, was preparing for a holiday in Barbados yesterday and was unavailable for comment. However, it is thought that he is keen to prepare a £500m deal that could see Lanica buy some of the Co-Op's non-food interests.

Comment, page 21

Safeway raises card war stakes

Peter Rodgers
Financial Editor

Supermarket competition in financial services was stepped up yesterday when Safeway launched a new interest-paying plastic card account in partnership with Abbey National.

The announcement came as Sainsbury's confirmed that it had received authorisation from the Bank of England to operate its planned joint venture with Bank of Scotland. Sainsbury's Bank, which will be launched before the end of March, will be 55 per cent owned by the supermarket group.

Safeway has stuck closer to the concept used by Tesco with its Club card, by putting its brand name on a card operated by an existing bank, rather than setting up its own bank.

Safeway said it hoped its ABC bonus account card would attract new customers as well as buy the loyalty of existing ones.

Jan Mumby, director of business development at Britain's third largest supermarket group, denied that Safeway was following a trend to move into financial services.

"I think we're doing something quite different from what our competitors are doing. So I would say we're not following, we're leading," he said.

The Safeway account offers 5 per cent pre-tax interest on balances of up to £600. Customers will be able to use the card at Safeway and any of 70,000 stores that accept Visa's Electron on-line debit card.

Cardholders will also collect points when shopping at Safeway, with extra points during the first 12 weeks the account is open. The cards can be used to withdraw cash from Abbey National's machines and 20,000 others, and customers will have access to a 24-hour telephone banking service.

Safeway said a range of other financial services would follow, which could include a current account with an overdraft and a credit card.

Safeway is working with Abbey towards providing banking within its stores, and other financial services such as personal loans and household insurance.

American and BA plan co-operation strategies

Michael Harrison

British Airways is examining ways to begin co-operating early with American Airlines even though regulatory hurdles in the US and Europe are likely to hold up the formal launch of their transatlantic alliance until late this year.

The news came as BA celebrated a decade in the private sector with record third-quarter profits and a special offer of 200 return tickets on Concorde for just £10.

Among the options being considered by BA and Ameri-

can are to begin sharing facilities at Heathrow and American's US hubs and joint marketing initiatives. BA executives said there were a number of areas in which they could collaborate in advance of the alliance being given anti-trust immunity by the US authorities.

They also expressed confidence that any link-up between American and the Spanish flag-carrier Iberia would not jeopardise the alliance. "Iberia would be a pretty odd bedfellow for us and doesn't have the right image but we do not think American would do anything that would

create difficulties for our alliance," one BA executive said.

BA's code-share agreement with USAir expires at the end of March but BA and American are unlikely to get the go-ahead to merge their transatlantic services until the autumn. The link-up is being examined by both the European Commission and the US Justice Department and Department of Transportation. The European Competition Commissioner, Karel van Miert, has warned he may take Britain to the European Court unless tougher conditions are imposed on the deal.

Mr Van Miert is also contesting BA's right to sell off runway slots as the price for getting regulatory approval, as this would amount to a backdoor form of state aid for airlines. The loss of the USAir link-up will deprive BA of an estimated £100m in extra profits. But as from this week BA is free to sell its 24.6 per cent holding in the carrier to other investors in a move which should allow it to at least recoup its original £250m investment. BA wrote down the value of the shareholding to £125m in 1995. USAir has until the end of this

week to repurchase the stake itself. Assuming that it decides not to, BA will begin negotiations with its advisers to dispose of the shareholding, probably through a placing in New York. The sale may not be completed in the current financial year.

Meanwhile, the BA chairman Sir Colin Marshall said he expected the economic growth that had fuelled record airline profits in 1996 to continue this year. BA, he added, remained on track to achieve £1bn of cost savings by the end of the decade through its business efficiency programme.

He was speaking as BA reported a 9 per cent advance in pre-tax profits to £113m for the three months to the end of December. The improvement came despite a 34 per cent rise in fuel costs which increased BA's fuel bill by £50m and reduced operating profits to £131m.

The Co-Operative offer will cost BA £1m in lost ticket revenue. The £10 return represents a saving of £5,400 on the current round fare. The tickets go on sale from 10pm tonight to the first callers to ring a special number: 0345 222111.

Investment column, page 22

American faces pilots' walk-out

David Osborne
New York

Last-ditch talks began yesterday to try to avert a potentially crippling pilots' strike at American Airlines. A walk-out would ground American, the largest domestic carrier in the US, and bring misery to travellers.

American, which is seeking regulatory approval of its proposed partnership across the Atlantic with British Airways, has warned that a walk-out would cost it in the region of \$1bn (£610m) a month, which would wipe out recent profits.

Unless a settlement is achieved at so-called "supermediation" talks in Washington DC under federal government auspices, the pilots' union, the Allied Pilots' Association, has vowed to declare a strike at midnight this Friday. Union officials have put the likelihood of a strike at about 50-50.

A strike could have a damaging ripple effect throughout the US economy. American accounts for about 20 per cent of US passenger travel and has a large share of freight and mail traffic. Most concerned are cities that are American hubs, like Miami, Chicago and its home base, Dallas-Fort Worth. It would also cast a chill over

both the Caribbean and Latin America, two regions where American is the pre-eminent US carrier.

In preparation for the worst, American has already prepared redundancy notices for 90,000 employees who would be placed on emergency unpaid leave. Also grounded would be American Eagle, the carriers' computer subsidiary.

The company, which is headed by the irascible Robert Crandall, has also drawn \$1bn from an existing credit line and borrowed an additional \$1bn - with its entire fleet as collateral - to provide it with a cash cushion to ride through a strike.

At issue is the pilots' demand for an 11.5 per cent pay rise over the four-year life of a new contract. American, which reported record profits in 1996, is offering 5 per cent. "We are faced with two disastrous alternatives - unacceptably high costs or cessation of operations," Mr Crandall wrote in a memo to employees.

For travellers, it is a nightmare scenario. Friday also marks the start of a public holiday, the "President's Day" weekend, and the start of half-term for many schools. A strike could leave thousands of travellers either unable to travel or stranded away from home.

STOCK MARKETS									
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7070	7070	9070	9070	15800	15800	10000	10000	10000	10000
7070	7070	9070	9070	15800	15800	10000	10000	10000	10000

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling		UK medium term		US long bond		Money Market Rates		Bond Yields	
5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
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5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50

CURRENCIES									
£/\$		£/DM		£/¥		Pound		Dollar	
1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324	1.6324
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Source: FT Information

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COMMENT

'Paradoxical as it seems, giving the Bank its independence is the best way to make monetary policy less arbitrary. Its independence will be required eventually in any case if Britain decides to join the single currency'

Labour shows the way forward for the Bank

Are interest rates safe in his hands? Kenneth Clarke says they are. He can point to the mix of low inflation and steady growth revealed by recent monthly economic statistics. Perhaps he will turn out to be right. But the point is that the reins of monetary policy should not rest in his hands alone. The arrangements rushed in after the failure of Britain's ERM policy in 1992 were supposed to create an institutional framework that would restore the credibility of policy and make the judgements less arbitrary. They have failed on both counts.

The arbitrariness is displayed by Mr Clarke's cheerful dismissal of advice from both the Bank of England and his own officials. In fact, he has disagreed with the Bank for most of the past two years. For part of 1995 and again since last May, the Bank has been much more hawkish - and with reason if you remember that inflation has only been below its 2.5 per cent target for two months during that entire period. Now many Treasury economists have come to share the Bank's diagnosis, and Mr Clarke turns out to be ignoring them too.

As for credibility, its absence is clear in the verdict of the financial markets. The British Government has to pay a lot more to borrow money than any other European government apart from that of Greece. Nor have inflationary expectations in Britain changed very much. There is a simple way of measuring this - by comparing the yield on index-linked and conventional gilts - and

it has fallen only slightly, with UK inflation expected to be above 4 per cent on a 5-10 year horizon.

A new Labour government would set the Bank of England on the road to independence by introducing a Monetary Policy Committee consisting of the Governor, Deputy Governor and six directors reporting to a more broadly-based Court of the Bank of England. If it worked well, the Bank would earn its independence.

Paradoxical as it seems, giving the Bank its independence is the best way to make monetary policy less arbitrary. Its independence will be required eventually in any case if Britain decides to join the single currency. But whether this happens or not, Labour's proposals would, shorn of their vagueness, be a huge improvement over the present arrangements. These have turned out not to check at all the untrammelled decisions of a Chancellor bowing to political pressures.

A broader - but sensible - range of appointments to the Bank's Court, a policy committee which could deliberate and report in secret, and therefore with honesty, but its minutes published with a delay; and ultimately an independent Bank - it is hard to see the flaw in what Labour is proposing.

If there is one, it would surely lie in the Chancellor's ability to pick and mix the advice of the monetary committee. If the committee were divided, for instance, he could choose the option that most suited him politically. The beauty of the present system

is that the Governor's advice is unambiguous. That said, however, these reforms would be a clear advance.

G7 cannot hold back the tide

There was something Camille-like about the cheery statements from the finance ministers who emerged from the G7 meeting this weekend. That's great, they cried to the foreign exchange markets, but don't move any further. Like the Danish king thanking the sea for washing his toes, but warning it not to tickle his ankles, they didn't sound particularly convincing.

The G7 finance ministers were right back in April 1995, when they collectively decided to take the steam out of the yen and the mark. The slow steady rise of the dollar since then in any case reflects the healthier US economy compared to its European and Japanese counterparts. But the idea that the trend will stop here simply isn't plausible.

When credible authorities announce that the economic fundamentals demand a particular (if broadly defined) correction in exchange rates, and convincingly convey their determination to get it by intervening in the markets, then traders take note. Why waste your time betting on a rising dollar if you know the Federal Reserve and the Bank of Japan have the power and the confidence to prevent it happening?

But that is not what is going on here. For a start, the G7 ministers made no mention of co-ordinated intervention this weekend.

More important, even if the finance ministers and central bankers had discussed building a sea wall, the chances are the markets wouldn't have taken them seriously for long. The US economy is growing well, and its fiscal position is strong. Across the Pacific on the other hand, the Japanese are slowly and painfully adjusting their economy to cope with the competitive pressures of the next century. While they are struggling, the yen will remain fragile.

This may be the time for the G7 to start thinking seriously about "target trading zones" for their currencies. Sounds a bit like a global version of the ill-fated ERM, doesn't it? But actually that is the implication of what finance ministers said this weekend. They want exchange rates broadly where they are for the time being. But are they prepared to do what the markets require in terms of intervention and policy to keep them there?

This man is not the next Lord Hanson

Is this a ramp, or what? It is hard to see how the astonishing rise over the last six months in the Lancia share price can be justified, other than on a wing and a prayer. Even if Andrew Regan does turn out to be

the high achieving entrepreneur true believers think he is, even if he does manage to pull off a deal with the Co-op and follow it in swift order with others, and even if he does transform those businesses into something they are not at the moment, can he really expect to vindicate the £97m of hope presently invested in the company's stock market value?

If you take the view that Mr Regan is the next Lord Hanson, then possibly. But actually, there's not much reason, so far, to think he is. For a start, he's only 31 years old, and as he fits someone of that age, his record of deal making is unspectacular. Right now there's lots of noise and speculation but not much action.

First there was the bid that never was for the mail order firm Freemans. Now this Co-op business. Billed as the deal of the month in a leading Sunday newspaper, the whole thing turned rapidly to farce yesterday. As it happened the Co-op hadn't even been approached. Letters were rapidly drafted and dispatched, but then ... well actually we don't want to sell anyway, so get lost.

Mr Regan's supporters say he's a serious guy, he's got some good ideas and backers, and one day soon he'll pull off something big. So far, there's scant evidence of it, however. This is one of those cases of the stock market's propensity to back the man, rather than the company and its business. Steer well dear, for unless you know exactly what you are doing, you'll get your fingers badly burnt.

Electricity firms 'may have to delay competition'

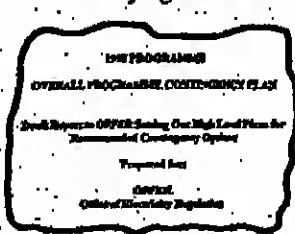
Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The electricity industry regulator may have to consider delaying the launch of domestic competition, planned to start in April 1998, rather than developing special contingency plans, according to a leaked report commissioned by its department, Oftec.

The document, submitted last month by PA Consulting Group, Oftec's programme manager for competition, also warns that the two preferred contingency arrangements may be so time-consuming and complicated that they may fail to work on time.

The latest disclosure about domestic competition follows comments last week by Professor Stephen Littlechild, the regulator, arguing that the complex process of transferring customers to alternative suppliers might have to be done manually if newly developed computer programs break down. Oftec's plan envisages a rolling programme extending competition to 20 million homes between April and September next year. PA Consulting was asked by Oftec to come up with contingency plans after growing doubts about whether the industry would meet this

timetable. Its report, which has been seen by *The Independent*, warns: "Delaying the launch of the competitive electricity supply market is a possible option for all scenarios. Before contingencies are invoked, the relative benefits of contingency versus delaying the launch



could be considered." It goes on to outline various possible contingency arrangements which would give customers the ability to move supplier even though the systems to manage the process had not been fully developed.

The report says Oftec will have to decide which plan to adopt by May, with a final decision on whether to implement the temporary arrangements due in September.

The first option involves new suppliers signing temporary bilateral agreements with the regional electricity companies, a

solution apparently favoured by Professor Littlechild. Existing bills would be sent out by the RECs in the usual way, except that they would go to the new supply companies rather than direct to households. However the PA report says these new contracts would have to be kept simple and concludes: "The major concern is that resolving [this] will take too long and the solution will become over complex."

The alternative contingency plan envisages developing temporary trading arrangements between suppliers and the Electricity Pool, the body which manages the wholesale power market. The PA document also doubts whether this would work. "This option may require changes to the Pool commercial arrangements, including the Operational Framework. Obtaining Pool members' agreement to such changes may prove extremely time consuming, if not impossible, to achieve."

Professor Littlechild insisted last week that competition could be made to work on time without the need for such fallback arrangements. However management consultants advising the RECs have suggested that at least a third of the 14 com-



Power plans: Professor Stephen Littlechild says competition can be made to work without contingency schemes

panies involved - 12 in England and Wales plus two in Scotland - are unlikely to have their computer systems ready in time. The fear inside the industry is that the contingency plans may be just as difficult to sort out.

The warnings of PA Consulting have been echoed by Andrew Claxton, chief executive of the Pool, which is spending £50m preparing for competition. He told a recent industry conference that the contingency plans could be so unattractive

that they would put off new suppliers from entering the market. Outlining the severe shortage of trained consultants to manage the computer problems, he said developing temporary fallback plans "implies a diversion of resources that can further compound the initial scarcity."

A spokeswoman for Oftec declined to comment on the report yesterday. She said PA was likely to produce a final version of the document in the next few weeks. This might be made public.

VDC shares slump on profits warning

Magnus Grimond

Shares in VDC, floated on the Alternative Investment Market at 400p in September 1995, crashed 110p to 165p yesterday after the medical products distributor warned that results would be "significantly below current expectations". The group, formerly known as the Veterinary Drug Company, blamed the problems on Procure Health, a dental supplies distribution business, acquired for £6.1m last April from Enviromed, the biotechnology group

run later by boardroom strife. Robert Rabone, VDC's finance director, said they had uncovered several deficiencies in the pricing systems for the 27,000 stock lines carried by Procure. He described it as "a systems-based problem rather than a fraud or anything like that". The faulty systems had resulted in margins being overstated, reducing profits by some

£240,000 compared with what they had previously thought.

Mr Rabone said Procure had also been running with volumes "at least 20 per cent" below the budgeted level in a competitive market. Since acquisition, it had been recovering from the significant fall-off in turnover it suffered at the hands of Enviromed. From the nadir reached in September 1995, the business had recovered to levels in December and January to above those of the comparable periods.

"But under the ownership of Enviromed, the management had put such strictures on the business that it had suffered badly, hence we bought it at a good price. Unfortunately, we are not now going to meet the market's expectations of growth in that business now."

Market forecasts for group profits in the current year to May were cut by £1m to around £1.7m yesterday, only slightly ahead of the previous year's

figure of £1.65m. Mr Rabone said Procure had made profits of £35,000 in the first half and had been expected to make "several hundred thousand" more in the second. They were now expecting to turn in a small loss.

Procure's market share of the dental supplies market, put at around 10 per cent when it was acquired, was now somewhere between 6 and 8 per cent. Mr Rabone said. As well as some loss of share to the operation's two or three bigger rivals, he said the accuracy of market information had been improved.

He said they would not be taking any legal or other action against the vendors of Procure, however Ernst & Young, the group's auditors, have been asked to extend their review of the interim financial statements. Management reporting systems have also been tightened up. VDC's interim results are expected to be released on 21 February.

High price hint for Centrica

British Gas brushed off recent pessimism about its share price performance yesterday when shares in its soon-to-be-demerged supply division, Centrica, began trading near the top end of analysts' expectations on the unofficial "grey market", writes Chris Godsmark.

Centrica shares ended at 70.5p, valuing the company at almost £3.2bn. Official trading begins next Monday, with the split from British Gas to be put to a shareholders' vote at an EGM tomorrow.

Yesterday's indicative price suggests the misery for 1.8 million small investors could be overdue. Previous estimates of Centrica's value had varied wildly, with some analysts putting the share price as low as 25p and others higher than 90p.

Simon Flowers, head of utilities at NatWest Securities, said: "The stock market has come to the conclusion that the assets are quite desirable and the liabilities are not as high as was previously thought."

Shares in BG, the pipeline business, closed on the grey market at 172.5p. British Gas shares were unchanged at 243.5p.

IN BRIEF

• A joint venture between Tarmac and Amec has won a £100m contract to build a second runway at Manchester Airport. The civil engineers said the runway, which will be almost two miles long, should be operational from spring 2000 and employ around 500 workers during its construction. Manchester Airport, which is facing some vocal public opposition to the plan, forecasts that its expansion will generate around 50,000 jobs for the region over the next 10 years, including 15,000 at the airport.

• Ionica, the company marketing a telephone service to homes based on wireless technology, is planning to extend its network to 3.5 million homes in the Midlands. The company, which is partly owned by Yorkshire Electricity and Northern Electric, launched its service in East Anglia last year. It claims it can undercut BT's domestic charges by around 15 per cent. The first stage of the expansion will be in Nottingham. Ionica has a national licence and plans to cover three quarters of England and Wales by 2000.

• Canal Plus, the French pay-TV group, said it may eventually be interested in listing its Paris Saint-Germain soccer team on the London stock exchange but that it had no plans to do so in 1997.

• British Telecommunications is confident that "no significant competition problems will emerge" and that its proposed merger with MCI Communications Corp "will be cleared in the next few months". BT directors told an all-party Trade and Industry select committee of MPs that the merger of the two companies will permit their complementary skills to be deployed to the benefit of customers in the UK, the US and other markets.

• Lloyd's of London will be calling for a further £25.6m from as many as 8,675 of the 34,000 names who accepted its Reconstruction and Renewal offer last summer. This will be payable in addition to the sums indicated in the settlements which the names agreed to. Some £2m relates to adverse exchange rate movements since R&R was accepted, which will affect some 6,000 names. Retention of dollar surpluses worth £18.6m in respect of the 1994 and 1995 underwriting losses will affect 2,500 names. The remaining £5m called upon will be paid by around 175 names, and relates to the under-realisation of assets pledged as funds at Lloyd's.

How Dow Jones plummeted in January

The US financial information group is facing a revolt over spending on its Telerate, writes David Osborne in New York

More used to being a purveyor of the news rather than a subject of it, the Dow Jones company, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*, is attracting shrill headlines about its flagging stock price and unrest among its shareholders.

Uncertainty about the future of the company, which also owns the Telerate global financial information service, has even led to media reports that it could be about to fall prey to one of its biggest rivals, Reuters of the UK.

The woes at Dow Jones centre on its share price which has long been stuck at around the \$39 (£24m) mark, well below its peak achieved 10 years ago.

The disappointing share performance has led to widely

publicised sniping from two members of the Bancroft family that founded and still controls the company, William Cox III and his cousin, Elisabeth Goth.

Last week saw the sudden resignation from the company payroll of Mr Cox, who had been in charge of Dow Jones' global stock indices. While Mr Cox gave no official reason for his decision, he indicated that it would liberate him to fight for a change of direction in management.

Most urgently at issue is the fate of Telerate, which has been falling behind the rival global services of Reuters and Bloom-

berg. Stock of Dow Jones took a beating in late January after the company announced that it would spend \$650m trying to revive the sagging service. Many investors had been hoping instead for a decision to dump Telerate.

Fortune magazine, meanwhile, recently revealed that the prominent New York money manager Michael Price has amassed 5.4 per cent of Dow Jones stock. The magazine last week tried to capitalise on its scoop by placing an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones refused to print it, however.

Mr Price has since spoken out about his disappointment with the decision to spend more money on Telerate and is expected to push for new additions to the Dow Jones board at its annual shareholders meeting in April. "Hopefully, there will be some smart people in there," he said.

There has been no confirmation, however, of Reuters or any other competitor exploring a hostile buyout. Members of the Bancroft family, Mr Cox included, have declared themselves unified in wishing to keep the company independent. "I would like to see Dow

Jones independent, but the best way to do that is to good corporate governance," Mr Cox remarked.

Of his own decision to quit his post, Mr Cox commented: "I think that it's the right route. It's difficult to work at the company and try to get better shareholder value. He added: "Obviously Michael Price is there and others are there because it's an underpriced stock."

Taking the heat in the dispute is the current chairman of Dow Jones, Peter Kann. A former Pulitzer Prize recipient and famed Vietnam war reporter, Mr Kann may be under pressure in April to spin off Telerate and cut the company's losses in it. There is no expectation, however, that his own position is at risk.

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Resignation wipes one-third off Toad market value

Magnus Grimond

Toad, the loss-making car security group backed by Chris Evans, the biotech entrepreneur, saw nearly one-third of its stock market value wiped out yesterday following the surprise resignation of the chief executive, Charles Parker, after just over a month in the job.

The company blamed "irreconcilable differences" between Mr Parker, who joined from the Charter industrial giant at the beginning of January, and the rest of the board. But the group also warned that sales in December and January had been "substantially below budget" due to disappointing trading through dealers and its own network of installers.

Mr Parker, who is on a £170,000 contract at 12 months notice, is to be replaced as chief executive by Kevin Gray, who became a non-executive director following the takeover of his Secur-Fix company last April.

The shares, which recently moved from the Alternative Investment Market to a full list-

ing, crashed 19.5p to 41.5p yesterday, wiping £3.3m off the group's former market capitalisation of £10.3m. The group has raised £10.6m in two placings at 90p and 80p a share over the past 14 months, the latest in January, but the shares have been sliding steadily since the start of the year, when they were trading at around 85p.

Mr Evans, who chairs the group and owns around 20 per cent of the shares, said there was "nothing substantive" to account for the departure of Mr Parker. There was "nothing massive. No major falling out. No bombshell," he said. He also dismissed any suggestion of Mr Parker uncovering a "black hole" at the group. "If there was, we would have been obliged to reveal it. It was just a whole number of little things," Mr Evans said.

The second-half loss for the group would be lower than for the comparable period of the previous year, but sales in January and February had been disappointing, he said. They were still on course for around £5m

sales for the year and a loss in the region of £3.5m, roughly in line with previous market forecasts.

He suggested compensation for loss of office would not be large. Mr Parker had resigned and was therefore legally entitled to nothing. "There may be some kind of payment, but it will not be substantial."

Mr Parker had spent several months last year doing what Mr Evans described as "due diligence" before throwing in his lot with Toad. He had been credited with pushing through Charter's highly successful £445m takeover of the Swedish welding rods group Esab in 1994. But it had been clear almost from when he took the reins in January that he was not comfortable in the job, Mr Evans said. "The leap from a big company to a small one, that's a hell of a leap. Time and time again, people fail in making that leap."

There were said to have been "fundamental disagreements" between Mr Parker and the non-executive directors over the way the group should be



Toad in a hole: Chris Evans (above) said there was 'no bombshell' behind Charles Parker's departure after only a month in charge

taken forward. Mr Evans, whose fortune based on biotech groups such as Chromacore was put at £60m last year, is one of three non-executives on the

company's board, along with John Morris, a fellow biotech investor, and Derek Whitaker, a former chief executive of the old British Leyland car group.

Dalgety dogged by Pedigree problems and BSE crisis

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY MAGNUS GRIMOND

It is two years since Dalgety launched a £180m rights issue to pay for the near-£500m deal to buy Quakers' European pet food operations. The cash call was priced at 335p. Yesterday the shares were barely above that level, closing up 1.5p at 341p. It has clearly been a rough two years for chief executive Richard Clothier and the jury is still out on whether the business is turning the corner.

At the time of the Quaker deal, the strategy to sell consumer foods divisions such as Golden Wonder and Homepride to concentrate on pet food looked plausible. But a lot has gone wrong since then.

The BSE crisis has hit the group's animal feeds division, the rival Mars-owned Pedigree Petfoods has been aggressive on pricing and the strength of sterling has affected overseas earnings. Integrating the Quaker pet foods business cost far more than originally anticipated.

The wounds were apparent in yesterday's half-year figures with pre-exceptional profits in the six months to 31 December down £4m to £43m. It was the agribusiness division which suffered most, with the BSE-inspired export ban causing excess capacity and increased costs, which were compounded by the strength of sterling.

Though pet food profits held up, the dog food business has been dented by Pedigree's marketing muscle. Dalgety's Felix brand has held off a marketing challenge by Pedigree's Whiskas brand. In dog food it will be hoping that its Winalot re-launch with the slogan "Live a lot, wag a lot, Winalot," raises sales as well as smiles.

With Dalgety's shares a long way south of their mid-1995 high of 480p, the group faces serious questions. The first is whether it can build its pet food business to do battle against Pedigree. Margins used to be measured in double digits in this business but are a long way short of that now.

Another question mark hangs over whether the group really needs four divisions. The US distribution business, which is dedicated to McDonald's, seems non-core though Dalgety is unlikely to raise more than book value for it. This business has not been helped by the slowdown in like-for-like sales at McDonald's outlets.

The US distribution business, which is dedicated to McDonald's, seems non-core though Dalgety is unlikely to raise more than book value for it. This business has not been helped by the slowdown in like-for-like sales at McDonald's outlets.

Mr Guthrie does not appear to be deterred from other business enterprises by yesterday's appointment. However, Mr Sim said: "He will not be doing anything in that sector which is competitive with Queensborough."

With the dividend barely covered by earnings, the City will start to become restless if there is not a Dalgety revival in the second half and management could find its position under scrutiny.

The animal feeds business should begin to stabilise post BSE, while the food ingredients division is solid enough.

With analysts forecasting full-year profits of £104m falling to £116m, the shares trade on a forward rating of 15 falling to 13. The real attraction is the 8 per cent yield, which should cover the downside risk and makes the shares worth holding.

USAir lifts BA profits

Where will British Airways be in another 10 years' time? Will it still be an airline in the accepted sense of the word or will the craze for shedding staff, cutting costs and outsourcing every conceivable function have turned it into the world's first truly virtual airline? Will it, for that matter, still be called British Airways or will a series of mega mergers have transformed it into a behemoth of the skies, as American or Oriental as it is British?

Those searching for clues in the airline's third-quarter results may be a little disappointed. Despite BA's goal of shaving £1bn from its cost base through the much-vaunted Business Efficiency Programme, employee costs are up by 10 per cent this year. Meanwhile, progress towards gaining regulatory approval for the American Airlines alliance is proving painfully slow.

Had it not been for £11m in dividend arrears from US Air, its erstwhile transatlantic partner, BA would have been celebrating a decade of private ownership not with another set of record figures but with a small decline in third-quarter profits.

True, many of the efficiencies pushed through by BA's chief executive Bob Ayling, such as packing the accounts department off to Bombay, are yet to show through. Nor can any amount of inspired leadership stop aviation fuel prices rising by a third -

the drag factor that is doing most to hold BA back.

Volatile oil prices, are, however, a fact of life for airlines. In the short run, BA will be judged on how well it has hedged its oil exposure and how quickly it can plug the gap in revenues that will be left when the USAir code-share agreement expires in April.

In the longer term, the challenge is to make the American alliance work in an era of open skies and increased competition while preventing the BA brand name from being devalued by too enthusiastic an approach to cost cutting.

Assuming full-year profits of £64m this year and £710m in 1998, the shares, up 11p at 547.5p, stand on a forward multiple of 12, falling to 11. They should still have some way to go, but given the uncertainties BA faces, a repeat of the 500 per cent return shareholders have enjoyed in the first decade of private ownership looks implausible.

Still questions over Admiral

Sir Lawrie Barratt, the chairman of Britain's second-highest householder, was quick to criticise rival Bryant for overpaying last year when it bought Admiral Homes for £62m. The deal gave Bryant a ready-made link bank in the South-east of England, where the recovery in the housing market has been strongest and development land is in shortest supply due to delays in planning permission.

But analysts remain perplexed as to why Bryant paid £6m more than Admiral's net asset value to buy, in effect, a job lot of plots. Normally purchasers would expect a discount, especially as Admiral was in the red at the time.

The result is that at 25 per cent, Bryant's plot cost in selling price ratio continues to be a burden. House price inflation was only modest in the six months to November and the group's average selling price, including Admiral, fell by £3,000 to £113,000, hit by a change in mix as more three-bed and fewer four-bed properties were sold.

But a rise in operating margins to 8.6 per cent from 6 per cent helped push pre-tax profits 52 per cent higher to £15.5m on sales of £257m (£232m). The maintained dividend of 1.45p was covered by earnings of 3.7p (2.4p).

Bryant sees a progressive improvement in confidence among home buyers rippling out from the South-east. It cites as evidence a 30 per cent rise in net reservations continuing into the second half - even if the corresponding year's figures were lousy - and it looks on course to hit its target of building 4,000 homes this year.

Better still, there are no signs yet that the prospect of a general election by May and the possibility of a rise in interest rates is affecting purchasers' confidence. With a fair wind and a post-election "honeymoon", double-digit margins are a distinct possibility next year as Bryant recovers from a low base.

But concerns about the Admiral deal and the continued presence of the small construction division will surely limit its recovery potential.

UBS has raised its pre-tax profits forecast for the year to May by £2m to £37m. That puts the shares, up 0.5p to 150p, on a chunky forward multiple of 17, yielding 4.2 per cent. High enough.

NFC boosted by prospect of Lynx sale

Patrick Toohar

Shares in NFC rose sharply yesterday after the transport and logistics group announced it was in talks to sell Lynx, its express parcels operation, to a management buyout team backed by venture capitalists at NatWest.

NFC's shares advanced 7.5p to 164p on the news, but remain adrift of the 200p reached in recent months.

In a statement NFC said it would be several weeks before a contract was signed because NatWest was currently under-

taking due diligence. A further announcement would be made when the current negotiations were concluded, NFC continued. The deal is expected to net NFC between £30m-£35m.

Lynx, which can deliver parcels overnight in Britain and continental Europe, had a net asset value of around £25m and turnover of £94m in the year to September, when it returned to profitability. It has had a chequered past with losses peaking at over £12m in 1993.

Analysts welcomed the news of the planned disposal. "Lynx is in a fierce and competitive

business and is barely making money but it is on the mend and should clear its net asset price," said Andrew Darke, transport analyst at brokers William de Broe. "Two years ago NFC could not give it away."

NFC, whose activities include Exel Logistics and Pickford transport group, has indicated for some time that Lynx was a non-core business, but management led by Gerry Murphy, who became chief executive in 1995, insisted it was in no rush to sell.

Link competes against the likes of UPS, Federal Express

and Nightfreight in a highly fragmented UK market where margins are notoriously wafer-thin.

The decision to sell Lynx ends months of speculation about its future within NFC. It is also part of Mr Murphy's strategy to concentrate its UK logistics operations on larger and fewer contracts. Mr Murphy also plans to build revenues in North America and reorganise a series of national networks in Europe.

Mr Murphy and Sir Christopher Bland, the chairman, who also joined NFC two years

ago, have presided over a wholesale clearance of directors as part of a £50m restructuring programme.

After slumping to a £39m profit in 1995, NFC recovered to make £105m on sales of £2.46bn in the year to September.

NFC is still left with a clutch of heavily loss-making businesses on the Continent after its ill-fated attempt to build a pan-European distribution system in the late-Eighties.

Sir Christopher recently ruled out selling the European businesses, saying divestment was not an option.

Queensborough selects Guthrie to build chain

Magnus Grimond

Michael Guthrie, who last October sold his Brightons restaurants group to Whitbread for £46m, has been appointed to the board of Queensborough Holdings with a brief to move the leisure group into "casual dining". Mr Guthrie, who made his first fortune floating the Mecca bingo to holiday group, is said to be ready to mount a bid to buy back Brightons' Pizza Piazza chain from Whitbread.

Mr Guthrie yesterday refused to comment on speculation about this or that he was behind one of the bids for Granada's Welcome Break chain of motorway service stations, which the television to hotels group is being forced to sell following last year's £3.9bn takeover of Forte. He said he could only confirm that he

intended to help Queensborough in building up a restaurant business. However, he emphasised: "One thing is for certain: I am not going into one-offs. I am going to build up a chain."

The stock market reacted well to the appointment, marking Queensborough's shares up 5p to 36p. Up to now the group, which is one of the stock market vehicles of biotech entrepreneur Kevin Leech, has been concentrating on building a caravan site and theme park empire, including Cheddar Gorge. But Stuart Sim, Queensborough's deputy chairman, said yesterday they were not ruling out an approach to Whitbread.

"The plan is the creation of new division within Queensborough, alongside its existing businesses, in that existing area of leisure dining services, as it is called." They had "several op-

tions and we are considering these very carefully at this time", both acquisitions and green field sites, he said.

Queensborough wants Mr Guthrie to spearhead plans to make it a force in high street, rather than city centre, dining. That did not necessarily assume building an enormous chain. Mr Sim suggested: "If you look at people like Burger King, a very dominant player, they have 300 restaurants. Everybody assumes they have thousands of restaurants. If you come to the pierhead of the market, Pizza Express has a relatively small number of restaurants."

Mr Guthrie does not appear to be deterred from other business enterprises by yesterday's appointment. However, Mr Sim said: "He will not be doing anything in that sector which is competitive with Queensborough."

Queens Moat sells 25 hotels

The struggling Queens Moat Houses company yesterday sold 25 hotels for £91.5m to a group of managers backed by Hambro European Ventures. The company has now sold all but 51 of its UK hotel portfolio in an attempt to cut debts.

Wayne Sanderson, an analyst at Merrill Lynch, said the price achieved for the 19 three-star County and six four-star Moat House brand hotels "sounds reasonable". However, he added that QMH still had a long way to go, with around £247m of senior debt to repay by the end of the year 2000.

The 25 hotels sold yesterday

have a total of 1,865 rooms, and made operating profits of £11.2m from £42.5m of sales in the financial year to 19 December.

QMH will use £65.5m of the sale proceeds to repay senior debt due this and next year; another £6m will be used to repay junior debt, some £17.5m will be set aside for capital improvements, and the remaining £22.5m will repay creditors.

Andrew Coppel, chief executive, said the sale represented an important step in the group's recovery. "It achieves almost the whole of the group's UK disposal programme in a single step and a significant reduction

in the group's debt repayment burden."

Last September, QMH reported that it lost £3.1m in the six months to June, compared with a £700,000 profit a year previously. However, it said it had made satisfactory progress in the second half helped by lower interest rates. Occupancy in UK managed hotels rose to 70 per cent from 67.8 per cent.

Occupancy levels and room rates in the Netherlands also increased, while performance in Germany fell.

Mr Coppel said prospects for further profits growth remained sound.

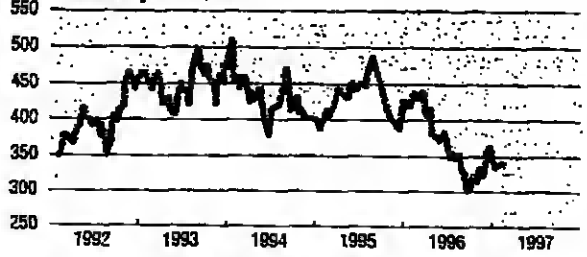
Company Results				
	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
British Airways (Q3)	2,030m (1.89m)	113m (104m)	9.2p (8.1p)	-1p
Bryant Group (Q)	257m (232m)	15.5m (10.1m)	3.7p (2.4p)	1.45p (1.45p)
Dalgety (Q)	2,190m (2,180m)	43.0m (49.4m)	9.3p (17.7p)	8.5p (8.5p)
London Industrial (H)	12.0m (10.2m)	3.58m (3.04m)	17.5p (15.7p)	-1p
Whitbread of Chelmsford (Q)	11.6m (9.11m)	0.55m (0.37m)	2.19p (1.67p)	1p 1p
(F) - Full (Q) - Interim (H) - Half year (Q) - Third quarter				

Dalgety : At a glance

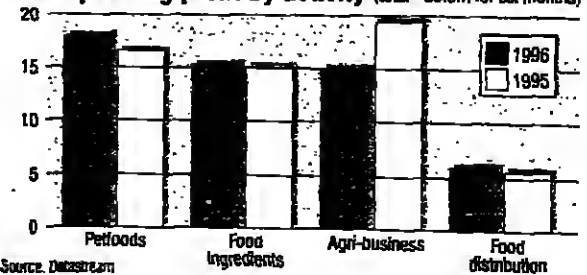
Market value: £967m, share price 341p

Trading record	94	95	96	95/6	96/7
Turnover (£20m)	4.5	4.8	4.9	2.12	2.12
Pre-tax profits (£m)	120.1	93.7	89.6	89.4	43.0
Earnings per share (p)	35.2	20.4	20.4	10.8	9.3
Dividends per share (p)	20.2	22.0	22.7	8.5	8.5

Share price price



Operating profit by activity (total = £3.8m for six months)

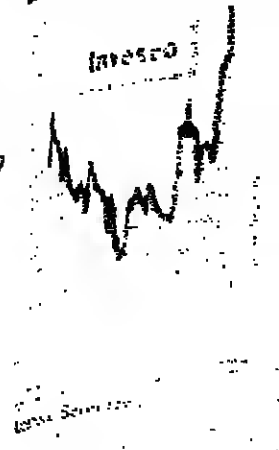


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As the professional game is pretty violent already I think the advantages of legalised padding outweigh the disadvantages

I am hoping for at least one upset in the Five Nations' Championship matches to be played on Saturday. If France beat Wales, and England beat Ireland, the vista would be what we have looked over so often in the past few years: a competition between France and Wales, to be decided by the England v France match, which will take place this year at Twickenham.

Of next Saturday's pair, it is the Dublin game that looks more likely to produce the surprise. Of the last 10 encounters there, both countries have won five apiece. Ireland last winning in 1993. Judged by their performance against Wales, they are perfectly capable of winning, though I do not think I shall risk much money unless the odds are favourable.

As my column last week was chiefly about the deficiencies of Antipodean referees, I did not have space to pay adequate tribute to their play in Cardiff. Jim Staples had a tremendous match. In one passage of play he showed that he was as fast as, maybe slightly faster than, Iwan Evans. On present form, he certainly deserves to go to South Africa with the Lions, though I should still prefer Neil Jenkins as first choice for his goal-kicking.

How many people, I wonder, noticed that Jenkins made a hash of catching the ball on his own line, so presenting Jonathan Bell with his head? I think that, because of the padding on the posts? I am all in favour of protecting players against injury, particularly in these new, harsher times.

But the padding on the Cardiff posts was rectangular and stuck out on each side of them. What is needed, surely, is padding that follows the circular contour of the post instead of being at variance with it.

As we are on the subject of padding, what about padding for players? As I understand the laws, protective clothing for chest, back and shoulder is still not allowed in rugby union, though in league it is. Yet in the Richmond v Moseley match last Saturday a Moseley player removed his jersey for one reason or another to reveal what looked like a bullet-proof jacket, which may have been a necessary addition for someone playing against the Quinell brothers.

Three years ago, when South



ALAN WATKINS

Africa were playing in Wales, I noticed François Pienaar emerging jerseyless from the dressing-room wearing copious quantities of padding round his shoulders. Most of his colleagues looked as if they were similarly protected. Obviously, on the hard grounds in South

Africa you need some extra covering, even though the laws of rugby union football are the same the world over.

My view is that, if players want this kind of protection, they should be allowed to have it. The laws should be amended accordingly. The contrary argument is that, the more protection that is allowed, the more violent the game will become. But as the professional game is pretty violent already - it can only be a matter of time before someone is killed - I think the advantages of legalised padding outweigh the disadvantages, though it may well be that our players will come more and more to resemble American footballers.

Playing for Richmond in the match I have briefly referred to was

last year's Irish full-back, Simon Mason, then of Orrell. He was probably the best full-back in the British Isles, judged by form rather than by reputation. Yet today he is in Irish estimation not only behind Staples but behind Conor O'Shea as well. Rugby is a capricious sport.

Eric Elwood would probably agree with that. When he first appeared in international rugby four years ago, he seemed an outside-half in the Irish mould, not as exciting as Tony Ward and Sam Campbell, perhaps, but a worthy successor nevertheless. The Irish selectors, having discovered yet another good outside-half, then proceeded to mess him about, dropping him, restoring him and then dropping him again for no very apparent reason. He certainly did all that was required of him against Wales.

Other players - notably the Irish back five - did considerably more. Seven of their forwards now play for Courage League clubs. In the past, there have been troubles, notably with London Irish, over players who are required both for provincial matches in Ireland and for training sessions there. I suggested that, as a compromise, these sessions should be held at Stansfeld Airport. Now even this seems to be unnecessary. They could be held instead at the London Irish's ground at Sunbury-on-Thames, which would presumably suit the new Irish coach, Brian Ashton, better than the present arrangements.

Henman humbled by Sinner

Tennis

JOHN ROBERTS reports from Dubai

Accustomed as we had become to reporting about Brytton ranked around No 180 losing first-round matches against opponents in the top 20, it came as something of a shock last night that an opponent ranked No 183 had defeated Oxford's world No 17, Tim Henman.

Such is the measure of Henman's impact recently that his fall to a German qualifier, Martin Sinner, 7-6, 6-4, in the Dubai Open disappointed the majority of the spectators.

It was the manner of the defeat that irritated Henman and observers who have charted his rise to prominence. "It's no good creating chances if you don't take them," he said, adding, "He had one chance - a double fault - and that was the crux."

The British No 1 failed to convert any of seven break points in the opening set, several of which were donated to him by Sinner's unforced errors - including two double-faults at 5-3. Although the German did not have a single break point in the set, he clinched the tie-break by two mini-breaks to one, 7-5.

Henman's double-faults subsequently presented Sinner with the first break of the match, for 2-1 in the second set. And even though Henman managed to break back in the next game, the success was chiefly due to his opponent, who could hardly have directed a high forehand volley over the baseline with greater awkwardness if he had been using a frying pan.

A bizarre sequence of shots, culminating with a winning smash after a net cord and a deflection off a net post - brought Sinner three break points in the ninth game. Henman - saved one with a serve and volley, only for Sinner to attack a second

serve with an impressive backhand pass.

Henman's backhand had been so unreliable for the majority of the 92 minutes of the match that there was a certain irony about the perfection of his shot which saved the first match point. Sinner did not hesitate over the second opportunity, passing Henman with a backhand across the court.

It was Henman's first match for three weeks, since a splendid start to the year as a finalist in Qatar, a victory in Sydney and an appearance in the third round of the Australian Open, in which he was defeated by Michael Chang, the No 2 seed.

"It's disappointing to lose in the first round, but it happens to a lot of players," Henman said. "Just because I've lost one match I don't think I need to change the direction in which I'm moving."

Sinner, 29 last Friday, had his career disrupted by torn ligaments in his left ankle, caused by playing football in 1989. The injury required three operations, the last in March 1993.

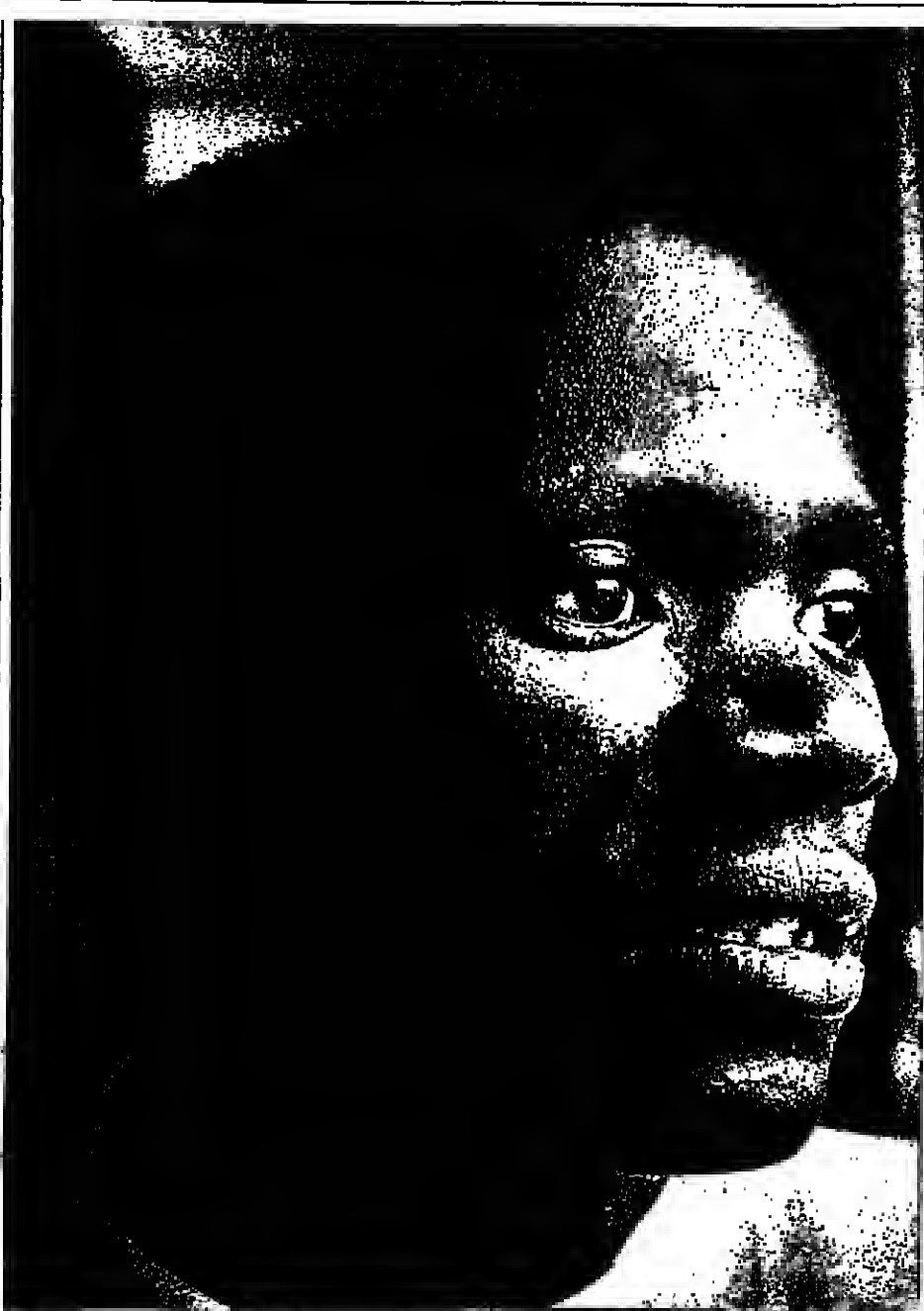
Henman had won their two previous matches in straight sets, on the grass at London's Queen's Club in 1995 and on an indoor carpet in Copenhagen last year. "Having talked about my performance tonight," Henman said, "I think Martin did very well and deserves a lot of credit."

This afternoon Henman is due to play doubles in partnership with Pat Cash, the 1987 Wimbledon champion, and intends to make the most of the special atmosphere here.

Things have never been quite the same in this part of the world since Peter O'Toole played Lawrence of Arabia. The novelty this year is an Irish village, complete with a replica of Balinacorney Post Office and a cartload of Guinness barrels, which has materialised on the west side of Dubai Tennis Stadium.

Far from a mirage, the reproduction of a little piece of Ireland to emphasise a strong connection between the Emerald Isle and the Dubai Open, specifically with the tournament's promoters, Dubai Duty Free.

Inspired by the success of the duty free operation at Shannon Airport, the director general of the Dubai Department of Civil Aviation, Mohi-ud Din Benhindi, sought the advice of the Irish Government. He was invited to Shannon and subsequently recruited staff to set up shop in the Emirates, people such as Colin McGoulin, who "came for five months and has been here for 14 years".



Josiah Thugwane in reflective mood yesterday

Photograph: Robert Hallam

Fear and running in South Africa

Mike Rowbottom on a perilous path for two men in the London Marathon

Having signed up Josiah Thugwane, the Olympic champion, for this year's London Marathon, the event organisers took the opportunity to show him round the capital yesterday.

First, he had a run on Hampstead Heath, then a press appearance at South Africa House, and finally a dental appointment to sort out the teeth which were brutally rearranged in a road rage incident near Johannesburg 12 days ago.

The diminutive 25-year-old, who earned a place in history as the first black South African to win Olympic gold, is pursuing his running career in terrifying circumstances.

After his surprise victory in Atlanta last August, he explained that the noticeable scar on his chin was from a bullet wound suffered five months earlier, when he had had a gun pulled on him after giving a lift to two men in a truck used to transport supplies to the township bar he runs.

The bullet shattered the windscreen after glancing his face, and Thugwane subsequently jumped from the moving vehicle, sustaining back injuries which affected his Olympic preparations.

He ran in Atlanta despite death threats against his family (he has a wife and four daughters). The day after his victory, the coal-mining company for whom Thugwane still works as a cleaner helped him relocate from the corrugated iron shack he had built himself

Mike Rowbottom on a perilous path for two men in the London Marathon

in the township of Mzini, to the middle-class Johannesburg suburb of Middelburg.

However, it was while he was returning there after a training session on January that he says he was forced off the road by three men in a car, beaten and shot at. "When I tried to run away the people in the car followed me," he says. "One of them shot at me. He wanted to injure my legs."

The 5ft 2in and seven stone runner was only saved when another car appeared and his assailants fled. He now trains 85 kilometres away from his home. "This is where I can focus my mind," he said. "Of course it is sad. But there is nothing I can do. This is my country."

Thugwane, who earned \$50,000 (£32,000) from appearing in the Fukoaka marathon in December and will get around twice that to run in London, is determined not to be demoralised. "I will run until I cannot run anymore. It is not only in South Africa that you can find such problems, you can meet them all over the world. If that's what I have to face, I will face it."

Thugwane's training partner, Lawrence Pele, who will also run in London on 13 April, pleaded yesterday for the South

African athletics federation to help secure the safety of Thugwane and other runners achieving commercial success in South Africa.

"The mechanics have to be there to protect this guy," Pele said. "The nation needs him. If he has to hide himself, we are never going to get happiness."

"We cannot carry on like this, otherwise it is demoralising for the young of South Africa. They are going to be scared. They will think: 'what's the use? You are going to perform but you will get killed'."

Pele, who sets off with Thugwane today for a training break in Colorado Springs, had his own brush with death recently. Last summer, after failing to get one of the three South African places in the Olympic marathon following training in the US, he made plans to race instead in Paris. He was booked on the TWA flight 800 which subsequently exploded over Long Island; but Pele was not aboard. He had cancelled his ticket after a last-minute change of heart in order to return home.

After watching reports of the disaster on television, Pele - who subsequently finished 27th in the Olympic marathon after being called up as a reserve - knelt down and prayed. "I had to accept it," he said. "It was in the hands of God."

Do not expect any bleating from these two men if things do not go to plan in London. They will both know they are lucky to be there.

Roberts robs Cambridge of winning run

Hockey
BILL COLWILL

Two second-half strikes from Tony Roberts, the Bishop's Stortford penalty corner expert, robbed Cambridge City the Adams Premier leaders, of their 100 per cent record in a 2-2 draw after Gareth Machin and Julian Archer had given City a 2-1 interval lead.

In the North, the leaders Norton, who dropped their first points of the season last weekend, dropped two more in a goalless draw away to Swalewell but with a game in hand had Form by six points. In the South, where two teams go through to the National League play-offs from the Nastro Azzurro Premier, Anchorians plus Hampstead and Westminster march on.

Second-placed Hampstead won 2-0 against Old Whitgiftians, while the leaders Anchorians had a comfortable 4-2 victory at Richmond.

Goulding summoned

Rugby League
DAVE HADFIELD

The Silk Cut Challenge Cup holders, St Helens, who leapt the biggest hurdle in the way of their retention of the trophy by beating Wigan at the weekend, have been drawn to meet either Huddersfield or Hull in the fifth round.

The two First Division sides, who drew at Huddersfield on Sunday, replay their tie at The Boulevard on Thursday, to avoid a clash with England's football match against Italy.

Saints will again be at home against the winners, but could be without their captain, Bobbie Goulding, for the rest of their Cup run. He will appear before the League's disciplinary committee on Thursday after being sent off for a high tackle on Wigan's Neil Cowie on Saturday.

Wigan's disciplinary committee will today study a video recording of the brawl that fol-

The Steelers keep pace with Cardiff

Ice hockey
STEVE PINDER

With just two weeks of the regular season left, only Sheffield Steelers can stop Cardiff Devils from lifting the inaugural Superleague title.

The Welsh side are four points clear but Steelers have two games in hand (one of which, against Ayr Scottish Eagles, was played last night).

Cardiff could have a more comfortable cushion had they not dropped two points at Nottingham Panthers, only their eighth defeat in 36 games. Nottingham, however, were brought back to earth the next day against Manchester Storm, who overcame a two-goal deficit to win 4-2.

There were no such difficulties for Devils, who easily beat Basingstoke Bison 6-2, while Steelers kept up the pace with similar ease, beating Newcastle 4-2.

Gomarsall confident

Rugby Union

Andy Gomarsall, the England scrum-half, is confident of being fit for England's Five Nations' Championship match in Ireland on Saturday despite suffering two injuries during Wasps' Courage League win at the weekend.

"The nerves in my shoulder went again, as they did against Scotland the previous week, and my ankle was stood on," Gomarsall said. "But I know the shoulder can be treated and bits of ice are being applied to my ankle." He will be expected to prove his fitness by tomorrow at the latest. If either of his joints lets him down, it would mean a first cap for Austin Healey, the Leicester scrum-half.

Meanwhile Ireland's training session at the University of Limerick yesterday had several players missing with injuries. David Corkery, the open-side flanker, has a broken finger and has been told not to get involved in any contact work.

A decision on the centre

TODAY'S NUMBER

800

The number of new badminton clubs to be established in South Africa's townships as part of a 2m rand (£300,000) initiative by Danmarks. It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to us," an official from the South African Badminton Union said.

SPORTING DIGEST

Baseball
Los Angeles 10, New York Yankees 3
Boston Red Sox 4, Toronto Blue Jays 1
St. Louis Cardinals 6, Pittsburgh Pirates 2
Cleveland Indians 5, Chicago White Sox 3
San Francisco Giants 4, San Diego Padres 2
Houston Astros 3, Texas Rangers 1
Seattle Mariners 2, Oakland Athletics 1
New York Mets 1, Philadelphia Phillies 0
Florida Marlins 2, Miami Marlins 1
Atlanta Braves 3, Cincinnati Reds 1
Pittsburgh Pirates 2, Cincinnati Reds 1
Cleveland Indians 5, Chicago White Sox 3
San Francisco Giants 4, San Diego Padres 2
Houston Astros 3, Texas Rangers 1
Seattle Mariners 2, Oakland Athletics 1
New York Mets 1, Philadelphia Phillies 0
Florida Marlins 2, Miami Marlins 1
Atlanta Braves 3, Cincinnati Reds 1
Pittsburgh Pirates 2, Cincinnati Reds 1

Cricket
South Africa 288, Zimbabwe 107
England 288, Zimbabwe 107
Australia 288, Zimbabwe 107
New Zealand 288, Zimbabwe 107
Pakistan 288, Zimbabwe 107
Sri Lanka 288, Zimbabwe 107
Bangladesh 288, Zimbabwe 107
India 288, Zimbabwe 107
West Indies 288, Zimbabwe 107
Afghanistan 288, Zimbabwe 107
Ireland 288, Zimbabwe 107
Scotland 288, Zimbabwe 107
Netherlands 288, Zimbabwe 107
Zimbabwe 288, Zimbabwe 107

Football
Manchester United 2, Liverpool 1
Chelsea 1, Arsenal 0
Tottenham 2, Newcastle 1
Aston Villa 1, Everton 0
Sheff Wed 1, Sheff Utd 0
Derby 1, Nottm Forest 0
Leeds 1, Middlesbrough 0
Bolton 1, Wigan 0
Preston 1, Barnsley 0
Sheff Hallam 1, Grimsby 0
Bristol City 1, Exeter 0
Bristol Rovers 1, Gillingham 0
Cardiff 1, Newport 0
Colchester 1, Dagenham 0
Crewe 1, Nantwich 0
Doncaster 1, Lincoln 0
Gillingham 1, Maidstone 0
Grimsby 1, Lincoln 0
Hartlepool 1, Macclesfield 0
Hemel Hempstead 1, Slough 0
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